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ABSTRACT

This study reviews research and looks at promotion policies in 85 school districts, including the United States' 40 largest districts, describes the practices that support social promotion, and identifies the policy changes that will be necessary to break the social promotion-retention-social promotion cycle. Social promotion prevails in these school districts because many districts implicitly support it and because in most districts there are no agreed-on, explicit standards of performance against which student progress can be judged and on which a credible and defensible promotion decision can be made. Teachers rarely have the final authority on retention decisions. There are few provisions for programs to prevent or intervene when students fall behind. Policies to help underachieving students must address the underlying causes of failure. For some students, repeating a grade may make sense, but for the majority of underachieving students, systemic change is required. Policies and practices must address the lack of standards, undemanding curriculum, underprepared teachers, and administrative indifference that undermine achievement. To eliminate social promotion, the following actions are required: (1) instituting polices to prevent early school failure; (2) adapting rigorous grade-by-grade standards; (3) providing timely intervention for students who are falling behind; (4) placing well-trained teachers in every classroom; (5) making it a top priority to give all teachers opportunities to learn how to teach students to read; and (6) learning from schools and districts that have successfully implemented research-based reforms. Three appendixes contain a list of districts participating in the survey, the criteria of the American Federation of Teachers for judging the quality of student achievement standards, and descriptions of four promising programs for raising student achievement. (Contains 6 tables and 44 references.) (SLD)

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ED 421 560

Passing on Failure

District Promotion Policies and Practices

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American Federation of Teachers

Passing on Failure:

District Promotion Policies And Practices

American Federation of Teachers
September 1997

DESIGN BORNSTEIN ASSOCIATES

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Executive Summary

Today, too many students graduate from high school ill-equipped to do college-level work or perform adequately in entry-level jobs. The public is becoming fed up and beginning to doubt that public schools are able to prepare students to lead productive lives. They wonder how so many students can graduate with so few skills. One explanation is "social promotion"—that is, school systems' practice of moving students from grade to grade regardless of their academic ability to do the work required at the next level.

Social promotion is an insidious practice that hides school failure and creates problems for everybody—for kids, who are deluded into thinking they have learned the skills to be successful or get the message that achievement doesn't count; for teachers who must face students who know that teachers wield no credible authority to demand hard work; for the business community and colleges that must spend millions of dollars on remediation, and for society that must deal with a growing proportion of uneducated citizens, unprepared to contribute productively to the economic and civic life of the nation.

The public believes that students should earn the right to move from grade to grade; they should demonstrate that they have mastered the knowledge and skills required of them. Students should know that performance counts. If students can't do the work they should not go forward.

Unfortunately, more retention—done in the customary way, that is, doing again what failed to work the first time around—is not the answer: we already have too much. Accurate figures are hard to come by, but it is estimated that between 15 and 19 percent of U.S. students are retained in grade each year, and in many large, urban districts, upwards of 50 percent of the students who enter kindergarten are likely to be retained at least once before they graduate or drop out.

Neither social promotion nor retention is an adequate response to student underachievement, in large measure because neither requires change in pedagogy, content or curriculum. Nevertheless, throughout the twentieth century the education pendulum has swung between these two policy alternatives.

This study: reviews research and looks at pro-

motion policies in 85 districts, including the nation's 40 largest districts; describes the practices that support social promotion; and identifies the kinds of policy changes that will be necessary if we are to break out of the social promotion-retention-social promotion cycle and address the problems of low achievement of many of our children, particularly poor and minority students

What did we find? Social promotion prevails for a number of reasons:

- Many districts implicitly support it and their policies declare retention the "option of last resort;"
- In most districts, there are no agreed-upon, explicit standards of performance against which student progress can be judged and on which a credible, defensible promotion decision can be made;
- Teachers, who have the most knowledge of students, often can make recommendations regarding retention but rarely have the final authority on such decisions, and frequently they are pressured by principals and parents to pass students along;
- Many districts require that, under certain conditions, students be moved ahead regardless of performance; and
- There is little provision for programs to prevent or intervene with students who fall behind.

Policies to help underachieving youngsters learn must address the underlying causes of failure. For some small number of students, creating a negative incentive—that is, the possibility of retention—may be enough to prompt success. For a few others, repeating the grade may make sense. But for the vast majority of underachieving students, systemic change is required if success is to be achieved.

Policies and practices have to be developed that address the problems of a lack of standards, undemanding curriculum, underprepared teachers, and administrative indifference to whether learning takes place. The policies must address the unique educational experiences and support services that children who fail or are at risk of failure need. Absent attention to these issues, we are doomed to continue the ineffective pendulum swing between social promotion and retention.

If we want to eliminate social promotion, we have to do the following:

- Institute policies to prevent early school failure. We need to get serious about providing excellent pre-school and all-day kindergarten programs to at-risk students. We need to reduce class size in the early grades and make sure that at-risk students have excellent reading instruction in the early grades. No child should leave third grade unable to read, and districts must have the supports in place to assure that this does not happen.
- Adopt rigorous grade-by-grade standards and develop assessments and curriculum to support them. With such standards teachers will be better able to identify students in trouble, and they can seek "just in time" interventions, rather than let problems fester.
- Provide timely intervention to children who are falling behind—one-on-one tutoring, "double dosing," parent counseling, extended-day and the like.
- Place well-trained teachers in every classroom by developing policies to attract and retain the best teachers in schools with high-risk student populations.
- Make it a top priority to provide all teachers with opportunities to learn how to teach students to read.
- Learn from schools and districts that have successfully implemented research-based reforms.

The bottom line: to end social promotion districts must design policies and programs to prevent failure of students, and to intervene swiftly when it occurs. They must examine the effectiveness of the policies and practices they institute and make changes—either in program implementation or in policy—where current efforts are ineffective.

Introduction

Despite recent progress in raising standards for American students—and despite the excellent performance of our students in the international reading and fourth-grade math and science studies (IEA,1992; TIMSS, 1997)—there is still distrust in the ability of the public schools to prepare students for college and the workplace. A glance at the newspapers tells the story:

- Chicago put 100 public schools on probation because less than 15 percent of the students in those schools scored at the national norm for their grade level. Indeed, in one high school, less than 4 percent of the students were reading at grade level (Terry, 1996).
- In Michigan, more than half of fourth graders and nearly six in 10 seventh graders receive unsatisfactory ratings on state reading tests (Lutz and Durant, 1996).
- In Boston, 40 percent of third graders score below grade level on citywide math tests, and 50 percent score below in reading (Avenoso, 1996).
- Alabama threatens to take over 25 districts where 40 percent or more of the students rank below the 25th percentile on standardized tests (*Education Week*, 1996).
- More than half of the 112,000 Maryland third- and fifth-grade students fail the Maryland School Performance Assessments (Bowler, 1996).
- Remedial education in college is costing taxpayers and students alike. In Florida, where 43 percent of 1994 new college entrants flunked at least one college-readiness course, the state spent $53 million on remediation. These statistics are not very different from those of other states. "Across the country, about a third of freshmen take remedial courses in college, and three-quarters of all campuses, public and private, offer remediation" (Dembner, 1996).
- Industry spends millions of dollars teaching basic skills to its entry-level employees. Last year, for example, MCI spent $7.5 million to provide basic skills training (*USA Today*, 1996).

One response to the evidence that students, particularly poor and minority students in urban school systems, are proceeding through school without reaching adequate standards of literacy and numeracy is to blame it on "social promotion"—that is, the practice of moving students from grade to grade regardless of their academic ability to do the work required at the next level. As President Clinton says, "No more free passes. If

you want people to learn, learning has to mean something" (Page, 1996). Students should earn the right to move from grade to grade; they should demonstrate that they have mastered the knowledge and skills required of them—and those standards should be set high. Students should know that performance counts.

The public agrees (Public Agenda, 1995). Ninety percent of the respondents in a recent public opinion poll indicated that they favored higher standards in the basic subjects—math, history, English, and science—for promotion from grade to grade, and 68 percent even favored requiring students to pass standardized national examinations for promotion from grade to grade (Elam and Rose, 1995).

Indeed, as critics point out, social promotion is an insidious practice that hides school failure and creates problems for everybody:

- ***For kids***, who are deluded into thinking they have learned the knowledge and skills necessary for success, who get the message that effort and achievement do not count, and most important, who often are denied access to the resources and support programs they need because their failure is not acknowledged by the system.
- ***For teachers***, who must deal with impossibly wide disparities in their students' preparation and achievement that result from social promotion, and who face students who know that teachers wield no credible authority to demand hard work.
- ***For parents***, who are lulled into thinking that their children are being adequately prepared for college, for civic responsibility, and for the world of work.
- ***For the business community***, which must invest millions of dollars in teaching new employees the basic skills they did not learn in school.
- ***For colleges and universities***, which must spend a sizable portion of their budgets on remedial courses to prepare high school graduates to do college-level work, and for the professors who must lower their standards in order to accommodate an ill-prepared student body.
- ***For taxpayers***, whose support of public education is eroded by evidence that a high school diploma is not necessarily a guarantee of basic literacy and numeracy.
- ***For society***, in general, which cannot afford, in both economic and civic terms, a growing proportion of uneducated citizens who neither benefit from, nor contribute to, the commonweal.

But, if social promotion is such a problem, why does it happen? Common sense dictates that students should not move to the next grade until they have the knowledge and skills needed to handle the new material. How can our education system permit hundreds of thousands of students to pass from grade to grade when they haven't acquired the skills and knowledge to do the work required? Why aren't students who fail to meet the standards retained in grade?

In fact, they are. There is clear evidence that retention—requiring students who have not mastered the work to repeat a grade—is just as rampant as social promotion in American schools. Accurate figures are hard to come by, but it is estimated that between 15 and 19 percent of U.S. students are retained in grade each year (Darling-Hammond and Falk, 1995). In large urban districts, upwards of 50 percent of the students who enter kindergarten are likely to be retained at least once before they graduate or drop out (Karweit, 1992; Slavin, 1996).

And as with social promotion, there is evidence that wholesale retention results in serious problems and significant costs:

- ***For kids***, who often do not significantly improve their academic skills as a result of being retained, but instead may become alienated from school, develop emotional and behavioral problems, and be at greater risk of dropping out.
- ***For teachers***, who must deal with overage and underachieving youngsters in their classes, many of whom act out their frustration by becoming

disruptive, and, thereby, deprive their classmates of an opportunity to learn.

- ***For taxpayers***, whose tax dollars pay for an additional year of school (on average $5,500 per pupil) for millions of students with no evidence that those dollars make a difference.

- ***For the future of public education***, which is threatened with privatization and voucher schemes because of the large failure rates of students, particularly in the inner cities.

Therein lies the dilemma—in their most customary applications, neither social promotion nor retention is an adequate solution to underachievement, in large measure because neither requires change in pedagogy, content, or curriculum. And perhaps because neither solves the basic problem, throughout the 20th century, the education pendulum has swung between these two policy approaches to student failure—being "soft" and getting "tough" (Labaree, 1984).

In the 1970s, with mounting evidence of the negative effects of student retention, particularly regarding self-esteem, social promotion was the prevailing policy. Then in the early 1980s, partly in response to *A Nation at Risk*'s (U.S. Department of Education, 1983) dire message about low student achievement, many districts passed stringent policies requiring retention of students based on their performance on standardized tests (Roderick, 1995). Chicago, New York City, Boston, Philadelphia, and Dade County, Fla., all instituted policies to retain students who failed standardized tests at various transitional points along the K-12 continuum. By the late 1980s, however, those policies were rescinded when research studies indicated that student achievement of retained students was not improved compared to students with similar reading scores who were socially promoted, but the retained students' dropout rate was higher (Gampert and Opperman, 1988; Olson, 1990; Darling-Hammond and Falk, 1995).

However, poor achievement of students, particularly inner-city, minority youth persists, and today the pendulum is again swinging back to retention as the best response to student failure. New York City in 1995 released a report, *Raising Standards for All*, that calls for an end to social promotion and the development of promotion policies that "certify levels of accomplishment, not simply passage of time in schools" (Chancellor's Commission on Educational Standards and Accountably, 1995, p.9). In its efforts to eliminate social promotion, Chicago is requiring all students at third, sixth, eighth, and ninth grades who do not score at grade level on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills to go to summer school and pass the test or be retained (Hendrie, 1997). Indeed, this spring almost half of Chicago's-ninth graders and upwards of 30 percent of third-, sixth-, and eighth-graders—some 43,000 students—were informed that they had to attend summer school to raise their test scores or be retained in grade. Other districts around the country are following suit (Lawton, 1997).

In an effort to halt the pendulum swing and to bring an end to social promotion, this report:

- Examines current district promotion and retention policies, and

- Suggests policy changes that are necessary to address the needs of low-performing students and maximize student success.

School District Promotion Policies: A Survey

The AFT surveyed 85 of the 820 largest school districts concerning their promotion policies.[1] These 820 districts, taken together, account for more than a third of all enrollments in the country and are responsible for educating students who live in urban, suburban, and rural areas. The districts are located in 32 states and vary in size from more than a million students to just under 10,000. All 85 districts responded to our survey. Seven of the districts had no formal, written policy, and decisions about promotion and retention were left to the discretion of individual schools in the district. The remaining 78 districts sent us their formal, written school board policies, which ranged from three-paragraph statements to 30-page documents, with little consistency among them.[2]

We reviewed the policies to determine:

- What standards are required for promotion;
- What evidence is used in decisions to retain students;
- What restrictions are placed on retention decisions;
- Who is involved in the decision;
- Who has the final decision-making authority;
- What interventions exist to prevent failure;
- What educational alternatives are available to failing students; and
- What the requirements are for reporting grade retention rates to the public.

[1] The sample was selected as follows: the 40 largest school districts were included, and then an additional 45 districts were chosen by selecting every 20th district in descending order of size from the 41st largest to the 820th largest district. See Appendix A for a list of districts.

[2] This analysis is based on the explicit, written district policies. As part of our procedure, we sent our analysis of the district policy back to each district, and where applicable, to union leaders in the district. Changes were made to our analysis if the district or union leader provided written documentation to warrant a correction. Discussions with school officials, and with union leaders in the districts surveyed, often indicated that practice was broader than explicit policy. For example, some district officials indicated that standardized test scores were part of the evidence used in decision making, even though the policy was not explicit on this matter, or union officials indicated that despite the policy, teacher recommendations were often disregarded. The reverse was also true. For example, school administrators and/or union officials sometimes indicated that despite the mandate for summer school for students who were to be retained, districts often had no funds available and consequently did not provide such programs.

What Standards Do Districts Use To Make Decisions on Promotion or Retention?

The first and most obvious problem with the policies is the absence of specific academic standards against which student progress is judged. Although about a third of the policies refer to curriculum guidelines, the language often is vague and not useful for ensuring that teachers and administrators have a commonly agreed upon expectation about satisfactory performance. For example, policies state that:

- To be promoted, a student's "progress should be continuous and student advancement through the curriculum should be according to the student's demonstrated ability" (Clark County Schools, Nev.);
- Promotion is dependent upon a student's ability to "demonstrate sufficient growth in learning required basic skills" (Long Beach Unified School District, Calif.);
- Promotion "is based upon an evaluation of each pupil's achievement in terms of appropriate instructional goals" (Duval County Public Schools, Fla.);
- To be retained a student must be "one or two years below performance expectations in most academic areas and indicate the ability to achieve at a higher level" (Janesville Board of Education, Wis.).
- "Retention should be based on insufficient progress in basic skills and on the student's inability to apply basic skills to the study of academic areas" (Hillsborough County, Fla.).

Some policies refer to the need for students to meet state standards. But a recent AFT analysis of state standards revealed that only 17 of the 50 states and the District of Columbia have standards in all four core disciplines—English, mathematics, social studies, and science—that are well grounded in content and clear and specific enough to be used as a common guide (AFT, 1997).[1]

What Evidence Is Used for Decisions Regarding Retention?

Teacher-assigned grades, standardized test scores, social/emotional development, attendance, and teacher recommendations form the evidence upon which most districts claim to base retention decisions. The significance of these factors varies with grade level (Table 1).

Grades. Most school districts today do not have agreed-upon standards of performance that support a uniform grading policy. Grades mean different things to different schools and to different teachers, and, as a result, are an uncertain guide to promotion/retention decisions. For example, a recent study of eighth-grade students indicates that more than 31 percent of them got mostly A's

[1] See Appendix B: *Setting Strong Standards: AFT's Criteria for Judging the Quality and Usefulness of Student Achievement Standards.*

TABLE 1

What Evidence Is Used in Retention Decisions?

Evidence	*Percent of Districts Elementary Level*	*Percent of Districts Middle School Level*	*Percent of Districts High School Level*
Teacher-Assigned Grades	48.2	58.8	64.7
Standardized Tests	38.8	35.3	23.5
Developmental Factors	45.9	36.5	21.2
Attendance	30.6	27.1	17.6
Teacher Recommendation	48.2	45.9	25.9

and another 38 percent got mostly B's. But when those grades were compared with student performance on an external math and English exam, it was clear that an "A" in a school with high concentrations of poor children did not represent the same high level of performance as an "A" for children in schools where only a few students came from poor families. Indeed, in poor schools "B's" were often given for work that would be considered failing in more affluent schools (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). It appears that grades are so variable, they provide no reliable basis for decisions on student progression.

When Austin and McCann (1992) surveyed 144 districts to determine grading practices and procedures, they learned that:

- Grading policies and procedures vary across districts;
- Policies fail to specify the criteria for determining grades and how those criteria should be applied;[4]
- Few of the districts, schools, and departments provide direction specific enough to ensure consistency in grading practices; and
- None of the districts provides staff development to help teachers assign grades that would be consistent within schools and across the district.

Standardized Tests. As Table 1 indicates, standardized tests are used most often in the elementary grades for decision making regarding promotion. These tests take several forms: commercial, criterion-based readiness tests such as the Metropolitan Test of Reading Readiness; norm-referenced achievement tests such as the California Test of Basic Skills and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills; and state-developed accountability tests.

Many education researchers (Shepard and Smith, 1987; Darling-Hammond, 1995) have criticized the use of commercial, standardized, multiple-choice tests in the early grades. In particular, they question the appropriateness of this format for young children and assert that such testing is both invalid and unreliable. Furthermore, the researchers note that *exclusive use* of those tests to make decisions can be harmful to children who may be wrongly labeled as immature or unready for school work and who, as a result of retention, may come to believe that they are incapable of performing well in school.[5]

The greater use of standardized tests in the early grades also reflects the fact that, at the elementary and middle school levels, promotion is based on general student achievement for the core content areas—English, science, social studies, and mathematics. Retention involves repeating the grade. At the high school level, and sometimes in junior high, promotion more often is based on the number of credits earned by passing individual courses. Failed courses, not the entire grade level, must be repeated. Thus, moving from freshman to sophomore status results from achieving satisfactory grades in a prescribed number of courses.

In high school (and sometimes in middle school) standardized tests are more likely to serve as an accountability measure, i.e., they lend credence to, or raise suspicions about, local grading practices. But standardized tests in the upper grades—usually imposed as a graduation requirement—are generally no more than basic skills tests and rarely require that students demonstrate high

[4] The researchers concluded that the variability and inconsistencies in grading reflect the conflicting views of the purpose of schooling that teachers hold: "Those who see the primary job of schools to be helping students master certain knowledge and skills, want *grades* to *define the current status of a student's achievement*—that is, its status against an explicit standard. Those who see the primary job of schools to be developmental—that is, helping students to develop increasingly mature patterns of thought and behavior—want *grades* to *describe the effort and progress students are making*. Those who see the primary job of schools to be providing multiple programs that are responsive to individual students' differences want *grades* to *differentiate students and their performance from other members of their class, grade, or age group* (Austin and McCann, 1992, emphasis added).

[5] Such exclusive use of tests for decision making is also contrary to the guidelines for proper test use promulgated by the American Psychological Association, the American Education Research Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education (APA, AERA, NCME, 1996).

standards of accomplishment in the core disciplines.[5]

Some states are also beginning to develop policies requiring adequate academic performance at various points along the K-12 continuum. Seven states,[6] up from four in 1996, require districts and schools to use state standards and assessments to determine whether students in certain grades can be promoted (AFT, 1997).

Developmental Factors. As with standardized tests, a student's emotional and social development plays a greater role in decision making at the elementary level than at the upper grade levels. Policies reflect this. At the elementary level, 46 percent of the policies indicate that retention may be based in part on developmental or readiness factors (Table 1). The policies speak of "social and emotional maturity," "physical factors," and "age and maturity" as important criteria to consider in making decisions about the retention or promotion of students. Promotion decisions in the middle grades still reflect some concern for developmental readiness (36 percent), but this concern drops substantially (21 percent) in high school progression policies.

Attendance. Attendance is a factor taken into account in decision making at all school levels. Some policies indicate the number of days or the percent of the school year that students must be in attendance:

- "A student will not be promoted if the student has more than eight (8) unexcused absences for the year" (Houston, Texas).
- "Students must attend school 80 percent or more of the days school is in session. Attendance for promotion will be determined at the end of each school year" (Nashville, Tenn.).
- "A student is expected to have a minimum of 85 percent validated days of attendance of the enrolled days within each grading period to receive passing report card grades" (Inglewood, Calif.).

Here again, at the high school level attendance is mentioned less often, and major emphasis is on grades earned for course credits. Some districts, however, concerned about truancy, especially at the high school level, have imposed mandatory attendance policies for promotion as one mechanism to keep students in school.

Teacher Recommendations. Some policies explicitly indicate that teachers' recommendations—based on observations, student performance on teacher developed tests, homework, and the like—can be brought to bear as evidence for decision making. In other policies, the teachers' role is implicit. For example, in high school, where most students have many teachers, their "recommendations"—as reflected in grades[7]—play a significant role in determining credits earned, and thus eligibility to move to the next grade level.

Policy Restrictions on the Retention of Students

Many of the policies we examined have language indicating that retention is the strategy of last resort. For example,

- "The policy of the San Diego Unified District is to ensure the success of every student. In light of research findings that grade level retention, especially after Grade 2, is harmful to students, non-promotion, especially after Grade 2, should only be considered when it is in the best interests of the child" (San Diego, Calif.).

[5] Only 17 states require students to pass a standardized test to graduate, and in only four states do those tests entail anything greater than basic skills assessment (AFT, 1996). There is, however, a growing interest in extending the coverage of graduation tests to core discipline areas (that is, beyond literacy and numeracy) and in setting passing standards at a level beyond minimal competency (AFT, 1997).

[6] Those states are: Arkansas, Florida, Louisiana, New Mexico, North Carolina, South Carolina, and West Virginia.

[7] As the Austin and McCann (1992) study indicates, grades often represent a teacher's judgment based on a number of factors—academic performance, results of teacher developed tests, standardized tests, teacher observations, and the like. For an interesting discussion of issues surrounding grading practices, see Elbow, 1986.

- "Retention should be considered only after all other options have been pursued" (Memphis, Tenn.).
- "All teachers face wide ranges of ability and achievement in the students who comprise their classes. Retention does very little to reduce this range of difference. Strong evidence suggests that student achievement and student adjustments are not enhanced by retention. The benefits of retention generally do not outweigh its adverse affects such as increased probability for dropping out of school" (Albuquerque, N.M.).

No policy explicitly endorses "social promotion," and a handful explicitly forbid it. Nevertheless, many policies include restrictions on retaining children under certain conditions—which is tantamount to endorsing social promotion. These restrictions are most often related to the age or grade level of students (e.g., students in kindergarten or between some grade span—kindergarten to third grade, sixth to eighth grade—cannot be retained); types of students (e.g., special education, limited English proficient (LEP), and/or at-risk students cannot be retained); or number of times a child can be retained.

No formal policy has a restriction on the number or percentage of students who can be retained. Although many teachers believe that capping the number of students who may be retained is a widespread administrative practice, the imposition of such limits is not the result of any formal policy in the districts we surveyed.

Table 2 presents the data concerning limitations on retention. Forty percent of the policies restrict the number of times a student can be retained. These restrictions involve the number of consecutive times a student can be retained and/or the number of times within a particular grade span a student can be retained. For example:

- Students may be retained only two times in kindergarten through fifth grade and then students are referred to the special services department for testing (Waterbury City Schools, Conn.);
- Only one retention in elementary school (Orange County, Fla.);
- Maximum retention of two years and then referral for diagnostic placement (Washington, D.C.);
- Only once in elementary school, and no double retentions (Baltimore County, Md.);
- No more than two times (New Orleans, La.); and
- No more than once in kindergarten to fourth grade, and once in fifth to eighth grade (Houston, Texas).

TABLE 2

Limitations on Retention

Limitations	*Percent of Districts*
Number of Times a Student Can Repeat	40.0
Type of Student	49.4
Special Education Students	45.9
LEP Students	27.1
At-Risk Students	3.5
Age	32.9
Grade Levels	16.5

Age limitations deal with the problem of "overaged children," that is, the 17-year-old who might still be in middle school as a result of multiple retentions. For example:

- In Chicago, students who are 15 years old prior to December 1 must be promoted to ninth grade regardless of academic achievement;
- Similarly, the Norfolk, Va., school district policy requires that students enter ninth grade by the age of 16; and
- The Milwaukee, Wis., policy says that students must complete sixth grade by age 14.

Several districts refer to these mandatory promotions as "placements," to acknowledge that the student has been moved ahead but has not been

promoted on the basis of achievement. While such policies prevent excessive retention of students, they fail to help students who have not succeeded despite retention.

Grade-level restrictions usually prohibit retention in certain grades, or more than one time within certain grade spans. For example, Montgomery County, Md., restricts retention in grades 1 and 2 and 4 and 5, and New York City restricts retention to one time from kindergarten through eighth grade.

Some districts explicitly acknowledge different treatment for disabled students (46 percent) or students with limited English proficiency (27 percent). The language of the policies usually stipulates that such students be placed and moved along at "a pace that is appropriate to their abilities."

Who Participates in the Decision To Retain Students?

Table 3 indicates that teachers, parents, principals, and others—counselors and sometimes school committees—all can play a role in promotion/retention decisions. Parental involvement in decisions regarding retention decreases as students move along the education continuum. The greater participation of parents in the decision-making process at the elementary level is not surprising given other research findings concerning the greater involvement of parents in school activities in general, and in their children's schooling, in particular, at the early grades.

Teachers have a significant advisory role in decisions about retention and/or promotion, particularly at the elementary and middle school levels. Their reduced participation in decision making at the high school level, as compared to elementary and middle school, may reflect the "mechanical manner" in which retention occurs at that level in many districts—that is, promotion and/or retention are the result of passing a specific number of courses and amassing the requisite credits to be moved to the next grade level.

Who Has the Final Authority in Promotion Decisions?

Parents are not only part of the decision-making process, but may also have the right to appeal the decision and, in a minority of districts, have final authority as to whether the student is promoted or retained. However, when policies are explicit on this matter, the principal is almost always the final authority (Table 4). In only rare instances are teachers given the final authority on decisions to retain or promote students, and surveys of teachers indicate that principals and/or parents may apply pressure to get the decisions reversed (Peter D. Hart Associates, 1996).

A few districts use a joint decision making process in final determinations regarding retention. For example, the Albuquerque, N. M. policy states:

> A conference consisting of principal, teacher, counselor, and parent must be scheduled and the parents notified of the conference. All factors will be taken into consideration. There should be a review of all records, and all significant points of view should be aired by all interested parties (Albuquerque, N. M.).

TABLE 3

Who Participates in Promotion Decision Making?

Participants	*Percent of Districts Elementary Level*	*Percent of Districts Middle School Level*	*Percent of Districts High School Level*
Teachers	60.0	58.8	35.3
Principals	68.2	70.6	45.9
Parents	70.6	62.4	38.8
Committee	25.9	25.9	17.6
Counselor/others	15.0	15.0	8.0

TABLE 4

Who Has the Final Authority in Promotion Decisions?

Final Authority	*Percent of Districts Elementary Level*	*Percent of Districts Middle School Level*	*Percent of Districts High School Level*
Principals	49.1	48.1	34.1
Teachers	3.5	3.5	2.4
Parents	4.7	1.2	0
Committee	9.4	10.6	3.5
Others	3.5	2.4	2.4

What Policies Do Districts Have To Prevent Failure?

The policies in several districts address services for students who are in danger of failing (Table 5). Chief among them is parental notification. Parental notification not only serves a legitimate "due process" function, but it is also an essential element in getting parents involved in their children's education and in decisions about their placement. It is significant to note that less than 60 percent of the districts require this.

TABLE 5

What Intervention Programs Exist To Prevent Failure?

Intervention Programs	*Percent of Districts*
Parental Notification	57.6
Tutoring	15.3
Alternative Programs	12.9
Diagnostic Testing	11.0

More important, very few districts mandate programs to assist students in danger of failing:

- Only 15 percent of the policies call for tutoring;
- Only 13 percent mention alternative programs and strategies such as "transitional" classes for students who are promoted but are not prepared to do the work at the next level, individualized plans for students, peer mentoring, reduced course load, additional instructional time in extended-day or extended-year programs, customized instructional programs, or supportive social services; and
- Only 11 percent discuss diagnostic testing for students identified as in danger of failing.

What Do Districts Do with Students Who Are Retained?

Despite the high retention rate in U.S. schools, particularly in urban areas, promotion policies do not generally offer many options as to educational treatments in addition to, or in lieu of, grade repetition (Table 6). Although, in practice, districts may have programs and alternatives for students who fail or who are at risk of failing, their policies on promotion and retention are mainly silent about their obligations to provide such alternatives.* Only one half of the district policies mention summer school, and discussions with school officials and union leaders indicate that in some instances funds to support summer school programs have been cut drastically, if not eliminated altogether. In several districts where summer school is offered, junior high and high school students must pay to

* District administrators often told us that they had programs, such as Title I, which are designed to assist disadvantaged children. But those programs were not explicitly mandated for children who were struggling or had failed, and the policies had no explicit references to other educational programs that must be made available to children who are retained.

attend, although some scholarships are available for needy youngsters.

TABLE 6

Consequences for Students Who are Retained

Consequences	*Percent of Districts*
Summer School	48.2
Tutoring	9.4
Reassign to Special Education	2.4
Reassess Next Year	8.2
Other	16.5

Other kinds of intervention programs for retained students include:

- "Double dosing"—that is, offering students at risk of failing particular subject matter an opportunity to have additional classes to learn the material (New Orleans, La.);
- The development of education plans to address particular needs of failing students (Cobb County, Ga. and Caldwell County, N. Car.);
- Remedial tutoring (New York City); and
- Smaller classes with more individual attention (Cincinnati, Ohio).

What Are the Reporting Requirements?

Public reporting regarding promotion and retention is one way a school district is held accountable. Yet, only a few of the district policies (14 percent) specifically require some form of public reporting regarding retention of students in

Teachers' Role in Promotion Decisions

The role teachers play in social promotion decisions is complicated. Teachers do not like social promotion, but they are ambivalent about retaining students. Ninety-four percent of teachers in a recent survey agreed with the statements: "...promoting students who are not truly prepared creates a burden for the receiving teachers and classmates. Automatic promotion inevitably brings down standards and impedes education." Yet, 54 percent of those same teachers indicated that they had promoted unprepared students in the past year. Why? Our polls indicate:

- Teachers do not have the authority to retain students.
- Teachers succumb to pressure from principals and parents to promote students that the teachers consider to be unprepared. Six in 10 teachers indicate that teachers in their school are pressured by principals and other administrators not to retain students, while 52 percent say parental pressure is a problem.
- Teachers fear that when students are retained, they will cause behavior and discipline problems in class.
- Teachers know that there is already a significant amount of retention occurring in schools.
- Teachers believe that the educational research indicates that retention is both harmful and ineffective.
- Teachers believe that there are insufficient educational alternatives to social promotion or retention for youngsters who do not master the grade-level material. They see their dilemma as having to choose between two unsatisfactory alternatives. Teachers often know that retention may result in students' repeating the same material, taught with the same instructional strategies that were ineffectual for those students in the first instance. To recommend retention in such a situation is not only a violation of all that teachers know about how children develop and learn, but it also lends support to what teachers perceive as a fundamental problem—the failure on the part of the administration to develop and support alternatives and prevention programs for children at risk of failure.

Peter D. Hart Associates. *Academic Standards and Student Discipline: AFT Teachers Assess Their Schools*, 1996.

grade. Furthermore, a review of district annual reports reveals that they are generally uninformative as to the level of performance required for promotion, how many students within a particular age cohort are retained, what educational services are provided to retained students, and what the subsequent educational outcomes are for those students.

Some reports give annual rates, some break the data down by individual school, by grade, or by characteristics of students (e.g., race, ethnicity,

Alternatives to Social Promotion

Some districts have policies in their promotion guidelines that call for programs designed to assist failing students. For example, **Cincinnati** has a policy that includes:

Grouping and Intervention: The district's restructuring and reform efforts include multi-age grouping practices and developmentally appropriate instructional practices. For students who need intervention to help them achieve at the level expected by the district standards, interventions such as after-school tutoring, and summer school are available to support immediate, in-class intervention in small group instruction.

Plus Programs: Students who do not meet the criteria for promotion to the next level of school but are at the age limitation to remain in their present level enter Three Plus, Six Plus, or Eight Plus programs where they are taught in small classes the skills, knowledge, or processes they are lacking. Different materials and instructional strategies are used (*Promotion in the Cincinnati Public Schools: Promotion Standards Criteria*, 1994, p. 2).

These policies have just been implemented and so data on their effectiveness is unavailable. Nonetheless, they are an attempt to acknowledge a problem and design programs to remedy it.

Albuquerque also requires that children in danger of failing receive special attention. The principal and parents must be notified early in the second term if retention is anticipated, and the teacher, principal, counselor, and other support personnel, as necessary, are charged with the responsibility of designing a special support program for each child in danger of failing. And of note, no student can be retained without a documented intervention plan and recommendations from school support staff concerning what unique education needs the student has and how they will be met.

Baltimore requires customizing intervention for students who are moved ahead but not ready for the next level:

When students are moving from grade 8 to grade 9 there is a conference regarding students who have not achieved promotion in the conventional manner. Prior to the end of the school year, a meeting called by the high school principal involving administrators, counselors, and other appropriate personnel, from both schools shall be held to review all previous interventions at the middle school level and to agree upon special provisions for the student at the high school. ...These provisions may include: peer tutors; study skills assistance; mentor programs; basic education courses; special education programs/services; work-study programs; referral to differentiated staffing personnel.

In **Houston** students falling behind in grades one through eight are identified by their teachers. Then,

Committees of teachers, administrators, and other school professionals will review each identified student..... The committee may recommend options including school-based interventions such as:

- Instructional assignment based on a continuous progress model;
- Instructional assignment involving multi-age/cross-age grouping;
- Participation in an extended-year program;
- Participation in an extended-day program;
- Instructional modifications that accelerate progress;
- Participation in a tutoring program (specialized, peer, and/or cross-age);
- Special program assignment; and/or
- Other interventions designed by the school that provide for maximum instructional progress by the student.

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and/or gender). In any event, the presentation of the data is such that it is often difficult to determine whether retention generally is a problem in the district, whether certain students are disproportionately affected, or whether failing students have been provided with extra help.

Conclusions Regarding Promotion Policies

Our examination of district student progression policies, review of research, and discussion with union leaders and district officials reveal that:

- In most districts, there are no agreed-upon explicit standards of performance to which students are held accountable;
- Grades and standardized tests, along with teacher recommendations, form the basis for most decisions about retention and promotion;
- Teachers play an advisory role in the progression decision, but the final decision almost always rests with the principal;
- No district advocates "social promotion"—but many districts have implicit social promotion policies in that they limit retention under certain conditions, regardless of student achievement (i.e., they restrict the number of times a student can be retained, the grades in which a student can be retained, and the types of students who can be retained);
- There are few mandates for intervention to prevent failure;
- With the exception of summer school, there are few alternative programs for children who are retained; and
- Reporting requirements about student progression are generally nonexistent or inadequate for informing citizens about the retention/promotion practices in their districts.

These findings indicate that district policies support social promotion by:

- Declaring retention the "option of last resort;"
- Having vague academic standards to which students are held accountable;
- Denying teachers, who have the most knowledge of students, significant authority in retention decisions;
- Mandating, under certain conditions, that students be moved ahead, regardless of performance; and
- Having few program options for preventing or intervening with students who fall behind.

Eliminating Social Promotion

Ending social promotion merely by developing a new set of rules about how students progress from grade to grade will not address the underlying problem, nor stop the policy seesaw between retention and promotion. Policy alternatives must ensure that students learn what they need to know to be successful in the next grade, and ultimately, in life. Ignoring the problem of failure (social promotion) or doing again what failed to work the first time (simple retention) is not the answer. Policy changes must address the underlying problems of why children do not achieve and what changes in school organization, curriculum, instruction, and educational programs are necessary if children are to succeed.

Social promotion is particularly insidious, not only because the problems of failing students are ignored, but because it sends a message to every student that effort and achievement hardly matter. If achievement is irrelevant to student progress, then teachers' ability to demand that all students meet high standards is seriously eroded.

Districts can initiate a number of immediate policies and programs to end social promotion and address the problems of chronic, systemic underachievement that is so prevalent in many of our urban schools. These include:

- Adopting rigorous standards and developing grade-by-grade curriculum to support them;
- Ensuring that all schools with large numbers of students at risk have a full complement of well-trained staff;
- Instituting policies to prevent early school failure; and
- Bringing "just in time" interventions to students who show evidence of falling behind.

Explicit Grade-by-Grade Standards

Clear academic standards are essential to higher achievement and success for all. As Lewis Carroll's Cheshire Cat said: "If you don't know where you're going, any road will take you there." Without explicit grade-by-grade standards for students, anything goes, and anything is accepted—and sometimes even mediocre or poor work is rewarded as excellent.

Commonly shared grade-by-grade standards for students are essential. These standards

- Support academic rigor and ensure fairness by defining the expectations for success for all students;
- Eliminate the need for every teacher to set his or her own standards for grading and promotion decisions, or for requesting special services for students who are falling behind;
- Give teachers the authority to demand that students work hard, without the risk of appearing arbitrary or mean;
- Make academic expectations public and, therefore, accessible to students, parents, and the community;

Why Students Fail

A very small percentage of children fail because they do not have the innate capacity to acquire the complex knowledge and skills required for functioning in today's information age. The vast majority of children are unsuccessful in school for other, more complicated reasons.

- Some children don't prosper in school because they are immature or otherwise unready for school.
- Some don't learn because we feed them with an empty spoon; they are not provided a rich curriculum and/or instructional practices that support high achievement.
- Others don't acquire the necessary knowledge and skills because of excessive absenteeism.
- Some students achieve at minimal levels because they make little effort to acquire knowledge—either because they do not view academic achievement as crucial or instrumental to their goals, there are no consequences to failure, or other things, such as money or physical prowess are more highly esteemed.
- Still others are the victims of ill-conceived theories about children and why they learn that result in failure—and in practices on the part of teachers, administrators, parents and students, and the wider society, which sustain low achievement.
- Some students don't learn because they have no incentive (positive or negative) to engage them in the educative process.
- And still others fail because of a combination of the reasons identified above.

Policies to help underachieving students learn must address these underlying causes of failure. For some students, creating a negative incentive may be enough. Sending them a clear signal that learning counts, that failure to perform will result in retention, may be sufficient to inspire this small number of students to devote attention to their studies. For a few others who have been absent, repeating the grade may make sense, since they were not exposed to the material in the first place. And for some children, particularly those with little or no access to high quality early childhood programs, repeating the early grades may make sense. But for the vast majority of underachieving students, systemic change is required if success is to be achieved. Policies and practices have to be developed that address the problems of a lack of standards, undemanding curriculum, underprepared teachers, and administrative indifference to whether learning takes place. These policies must address what unique educational experiences and support services are necessary for children who fail or are at risk of failure. Absent attention to these issues, we are doomed to continue the ineffective pendulum swing between social promotion and retention.

- Furnish the basis for professional development for teachers as they come to consensus about what evidence of student learning is appropriate, how to spot problems in achieving the standards, and what strategies enhance student progress toward meeting the standards; and, most important
- Provide the basis for monitoring and managing student learning and making decisions about promotion, retention, and the need for additional educational services.

District policies must specify the content and performance standards in each grade and/or schooling level (elementary, middle, and secondary) that students must achieve in order to be promoted and must include

state- or districtwide assessments, based on the standards. Such assessments provide an external check on the teaching and learning process.

The assessments must include benchmarks of inadequate, satisfactory, and outstanding performance on the standards so that all stakeholders—students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the broader community—have a shared understanding, not only of the content that students are expected to master (the "what" of standards), but also of the level of performance required to meet the standards (the "how much" of the standards). Assessment of students must be ongoing, not just at the end of the term, and must feed into daily decisions teachers make regarding appropriate instruction and assistance for struggling students. *Districts must provide teachers with the opportunity to learn about and use a variety of assessment strategies to determine where their students are in relation to the standards and to diagnose problems related to students' meeting the standards.*

Well-Prepared Teachers

All too often students at-risk of failure are taught by individuals who have not been adequately prepared to teach children effectively. As the report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future indicates, a full 14 percent of the teacher workforce is hired on a temporary, provisional, or emergency basis, and:

> In the nation's poorest schools, where hiring is most lax and teacher turnover is constant, the results are disastrous. Thousands of children are taught throughout their school careers by a parade of teachers without preparation in the fields they teach, inexperienced beginners with little training and mentoring, and short-term substitutes trying to cope with constant staff disruptions. It is more surprising that some of these children manage to learn than that so many fail to do so (*What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, 1996, p. 16).

Indeed, in some New York City schools under registration review (SURR)—where the rate of student failure is so high that the schools are threatened with closure if they do not improve—more than half of the teachers are inexperienced and unlicensed (Darling-Hammond and Falk, 1995). Without experienced, well-trained teachers in these schools, neither holding students back nor socially promoting them is likely to have much effect. *Districts must change their staffing practices and develop policies to attract and maintain a skilled teaching force, especially in schools with high-risk student populations.*

Early Intervention—Getting It Right at the Start

The evidence is overwhelming—the best, most cost-effective remedial program is one that prevents students from falling behind in the first place. As Alexander, Entwisle, and Dauber (1994) put it, the answer to social promotion and retention is intervention policies that ensure that resources are brought to bear to promote successful student learning, especially for those children at risk of failure.

For long-term success, it is crucial that young students be provided with a firm academic foundation, particularly in reading. Districts must give full attention to ensuring that every student learns to read by third grade. To do this it is necessary to have well-trained teachers who not only can identify problems early, but who also can bring to bear a combination of instructional methods to deal with youngsters' reading difficulties. For example, research has indicated that, if they are to learn to read well, many children need explicit instruction in decoding and comprehension skills as well as engaging curricular materials. Unfortunately, many teachers have little training in teaching such skills, and are apt to have limited knowledge of effective programs for working with children at risk (Moats, 1995). *A top-priority policy objective for any district that wishes to eliminate social promotion and that wants kids to "get it right from the start" is to require that all teachers, especially at the elementary school level, are thoroughly skilled in the teaching of reading.*

To make matters harder, many children—particularly those from high-poverty areas—come to school at an educational disadvantage. Many will have had little or no exposure to reading and writing at home, and no experience with the cultural norms and social expectations of public school. To

help create an equal playing field, *districts must provide poor and minority children with access to preschool programs that prepare them for success in kindergarten, and in particular, provide these children with the pre-literate skills (e.g., "A, B, Cs" and exposure to children's literature) that are necessary for learning to read. It is also essential that, from the start, districts develop comprehensive outreach programs to form partnerships with parents so that they can become actively involved in, and provide more effective support to, their children's education* (Comer, Haynes and Hamilton-Lee, 1989).

The research clearly shows that if children at risk are to be successful in school, they must receive individual attention. One way to provide such attention is with smaller classes, a policy that has been shown to improve achievement in the early grades (Mosteller, 1995). *Districts must develop policies to reduce class size in the early grades, especially in schools with high proportions of poor and minority students.* Other programs that provide early interventions include one-on-one tutoring, nongraded primary programs in which students have the opportunity to acquire the necessary skills at the fastest possible pace, and extended learning time—longer school days or more days of instruction (Slavin, Karweit, and Wasik, 1993).

"Just-in-Time" Interventions

A key goal of establishing clear academic standards, and regularly checking students through the use of aligned assessments, is to ensure that any problems are caught early, before students fall too far behind. Unless every effort is made to intervene quickly, students are likely to fall further and further behind as they proceed through the system. Indeed, in a longitudinal study of retention in a cohort of Baltimore students, Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber (1994) found retrospectively that even as early as the beginning of first grade:

> ...children who will be retained some time in elementary or middle school are far behind academically at the start of school. Their first marks indicate that they are having trouble with the curriculum, and their test scores at the beginning of the first grade show serious deficiencies in terms of readiness skills (Alexander, Entwisle and Dauber, 1994, p. 58).

Unlike medicine, which places an emphasis on prevention and early detection, school districts often wait until the problem is full-blown—for example, using students' test results at the end of sixth or ninth grade—before treatment begins. *Districts must develop policies and programs that provide immediate, "just in time" interventions to students at the first sign of trouble.*

While the development of policies to promote early intervention and prevention are vital, districts must also be ready to respond to the needs of students who have already fallen far behind. This is more difficult, but not impossible. Because the goal is to ensure that all students meet the same high standards, it is important to note that the traditional approach to remediation—dumbing down the curriculum and leading students through it at a slower pace—is a recipe for failure. If struggling students are ever to catch up to their peers, the emphasis must be on accelerating the pace of learning.

According to research, one of the most effective, standards-aligned intervention methods is to increase the instructional time for struggling students, especially intensive instruction delivered by a trained adult—i.e., one-on-one tutoring, Saturday classes, an extra period in the problem subject area ("double-dosing"), and summer school. Unfortunately, one recent study of remediation practices in schools (McIver, 1991) found that this type of intervention is relatively rare.

Ninety-five percent of public schools were found to offer struggling students at least one intervention option, including:

- Extra homework (56 percent),
- Pull-out programs in reading or English (50 percent),
- Before- or after-school coaching classes (46 percent),
- Peer tutoring (45 percent),
- Pull-out programs in math (43 percent).

Schools were less likely to offer:

- Summer school (41 percent),
- One-on-one adult tutors (35 percent in math, 34 percent in English),
- An extra core subject period in lieu of an elective course or "double-dosing" (17 percent),
- Saturday classes (3 percent).

In other words, schools tend to do least what research shows will work best.

Districts must furnish the resources for effective programs and services for students in danger of failing—"double dose" instruction, Saturday classes, summer school, tutoring and the like. They must also provide the professional development opportunities that teachers need to be effective with such students.

Ending Social Promotion

We have learned from experience that neither teaching nor learning is automatic, inevitable, or easy. We have also learned that social promotion and retention—the most common responses to student failure—are inadequate to the need. Even so, there is reason for optimism. We know things don't have to be this way. Around the country—in some of the poorest, toughest neighborhoods—there are schools that are working, and working well. Many of these schools have achieved success by implementing replicable programs, specifically designed to raise the achievement levels of struggloing students. [10]

[10] See Appendix C for a description of four promising programs for raising student achievement.

A Recipe for School Reform

Substantially raising achievement levels in schools that have been plagued by widespread student failure is very difficult. It need not be impossible, however, especially if each school and each teacher isn't forced to reinvent the wheel. Indeed, research demonstrates that schools can increase their odds significantly by finding and replicating research-proven programs—those with a strong track record of success in similar situations.

Unfortunately, this is not how education reform in America has traditionally worked. In a 1996 editorial, the late AFT president Albert Shanker contrasted education with the culinary arts. He described how a quick and easy recipe for French bread had been developed by a chef, toiling away for many years to achieve the best possible results by finding the right ingredients and baking procedures. If the chef had been a school reformer, noted Shanker, "it's unlikely that he would have tried to get exact ingredients and procedures—many school reformers stop when they have a general idea of what they want. People would have implemented this general idea in all kinds of ways, and most of them would have been disappointed with the results. ('*This* is French bread?')"

Fortunately, this has begun to change in education and some reform efforts are following a path similar to baking, medicine, pharmacology, and most other skilled professions. They have recognized that the substance and processes of education reform must be clearly and fully specified.

But specifying the particulars is not enough for successful change to occur. When Johns Hopkins researchers (Stringfield, et. al., 1996) looked at successful replications of school improvement efforts, they found that "a large part of the 'effectiveness' of a particular program is determined by the willingness of the members of the schools, district, and community to undertake the particular reforms." One key reason is that it is difficult to replicate the success of an adopted program without a full and faithful implementation—i.e., replicating all factors that brought success to the original site. School staff must first have the opportunity to "buy into" a reform model, and then must be provided with all of the professional development, materials, and support they will need to make the program work. Even a fool-proof recipe can be botched if the baker makes "little" adjustments—substituting milk for cream, margarine for butter, cocoa for chocolate—a common occurrence at many schools claiming to replicate "proven programs."

The research indicates that most programs which are effective in educating at-risk youngsters and raising their levels of achievement share several essential characteristics. They have:

- A clear academic focus and rigorous curriculum,
- A safe and orderly environment,
- Small class sizes,
- Instructional strategies designed to maximize time on task,
- Frequent monitoring of individual student performance,
- Extensive staff development and training in support of the program.

As with any educational reform, however, replicating the achievement gains of these programs is not guaranteed. Success will depend heavily on how well a given program or reform is implemented, how early a student's difficulties are caught and corrected, and the level of commitment among the educators and administrators charged with making the program work.

Districts can develop programs to ensure the academic success of even the most troubled and disadvantaged students. Children achieve when they are taught the basics early; when they are challenged by high standards and a rich curriculum; and when caring, firm adults pay strict attention to the quality of students' work and behavior. Schools that work this way are the ones we want to send our own children to. They are the schools that all of our students deserve. They are the ones districts must create if we are to eliminate social promotion and help all students learn.

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APPENDIX A:

Districts Participating in the Survey

Albuquerque Public Schools, N. M.
Anderson County School District 5, S. Car.
Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Md.
Austin ISD, Texas
Baltimore County Public Schools, Md.
Brandywine School District, Del.
Broward County School District, Fla.
Bullitt County Schools, Ken.
Caldwell County Schools, N. Car.
Cartwright Elementary School District #83, Ariz.
Charlotte-Mecklenburg School District, N. Car.
Chesapeake Public Schools, Va.
Chesterfield County Schools, Va.
Chicago Public Schools, Ill.
Chino Unified School District, Calif.
Cincinnati Public Schools, Ohio
City School District of the City of New York, N.Y.
Clark County School District, Nev.
Cleveland Public Schools, Ohio
Cobb County School District, Ga.
Compton Unified School District, Calif.
Coweta County School System, Ga.
District of Columbia Public Schools, D.C.
Dade County Public Schools, Fla.
Dallas Public Schools, Texas
DeKalb County School System, Ga.
Detroit Public Schools, Area G, Mich.
Duvall County Public Schools, Fla.
Edgewood ISD, Texas
Eugene School District, Ore.
Fairfax County Public Schools, Va.
Folsom Cordova Unified School District, Calif.
Fort Worth ISD, Texas
Fresno Unified School District, Calif.
Glendale School District 40, Ariz.
Granite School District, Ut.
Greece Central School District, N.Y.
Gwinnett County Public Schools, Ga.
Hamilton City School District, Ohio
Hawaii Department of Education, Hawaii
Hillsborough County Public Schools, Fla.
Houston ISD, Texas
Independence School District, Mo.
Inglewood Unified School District, Calif.
Janesville School District, Wis.
Jefferson County Schools, Colo.
Jefferson County Public Schools, Ken.
Jefferson Parish Schools, La.
Jersey City School District, N.J.
Jordan School District, Ut.
Kansas City Unified School District, Kans.
Lake Washington School District 414, Wash.
Lansing School District, Mich.
Long Beach Unified School District, Calif.
Los Angeles Unified School District, Calif.
Memphis City Schools, Tenn.
Mesa Unified School District, Ariz.
Metro School District, Ind.
Milwaukee Public Schools, Wis.
Mobile County Public Schools, Fla.
Montgomery County Public Schools, Md.
Nashville-Davidson County Schools, Tenn.
New Orleans Public Schools, La.
Norfolk City Schools, Va.
Ogden City School District, Ut.
Orange County Public Schools, Fla.
Palm Beach County School District, Fla.
Philadelphia School District, Penn.
Pinellas County Public Schools, Fla.
Polk County Public Schools, Fla.
Prince George's County Public Schools, Md.
Rochester City School District, N.Y.
Rockingham County Consolidated Schools, N. Car.
Salinas Union H.S. District, Calif.
San Diego City Schools, Calif.
San Marcos Unified School District, Calif.
Santa Rosa County School District, Fla.
Shelby County Schools, Tenn.
Socorro ISD, Texas
Springfield School District R-12, Mo.
St. Mary's County Public Schools, Md.
Vigo County School Corporation, Ind.
Virginia Beach City Public Schools, Va.
Wake County School District, N. Car.
Waterbury City Schools, Conn.

APPENDIX B:

AFT's Criteria for Judging the Quality and Usefulness of Student Achievement Standards

Imagine it is 10 years from now. Instead of endless news stories decrying the low quality of American schools, instead of constant proposals for private school vouchers and other forms of privatization, and instead of school bond votes sinking because voters feel they are pouring good money after bad, America's public schools have turned themselves around.

Teachers, parents, taxpayers—and the students themselves—all know what we expect our children to know and be able to do, because states have adopted and publicized clearly defined academic standards and translated them into curriculum frameworks that guide instruction. What our students study is no longer delegated to a handful of textbook publishers. The expectations for students are high—as demanding as the standards met by students in other industrialized countries. And the belief that all students can do challenging work has put an end to the watered-down curricula that so many kids—especially those in the inner city—used to receive.

Students are periodically tested on whether they're reaching the standards, and if they're not, the system responds with appropriate assistance and intervention. Until students meet the standards, they won't be able to graduate from high school or to enter college, and they won't have an easy out—even McDonald's won't hire them until they meet some version of the standards. Since learning now "counts," parents no longer complain about too much homework or teachers who are too strict. Instead, they support teachers' efforts to elicit hard work from their children. The relationship between teachers and their students has improved, too; it has become similar to that of a coach to his team. Students know that much depends on their success in reaching clearly defined goals, and they see teachers as their allies in that joint effort.

Teachers' roles are further strengthened because all components of the school system are devoted to helping students achieve the standards and, therefore, are all working together: The curriculum that teachers use is based on these standards and so are the assessments (instruction is no longer distorted by the drive to produce high scores on multiple-choice, basic-skills tests); teacher education and professional development programs are focused on preparing teachers to help students meet the standards (instead of one-shot workshops on generic teaching skills or the latest fads); and textbooks and other instructional materials are tailored to the content of the curriculum frameworks.

Finally, the federal government, the state education agency, and school district have greatly loosened the rules and regulations that have smothered innovation in the past. With standards and assessments to measure their success, schools and teachers are free to find and devise the best programs and strategies for helping students succeed.

This may sound like a fantasy, but it is the way school systems in most other industrialized countries function, which is a major reason why their students consistently outperform ours on international assessments. It was also the major impetus behind the nation's two education summits and the reason that virtually every state in the country is in the process of developing, reviewing or strengthening their academic standards, many of them encouraged to do so by Goals 2000 legislation. According to several recent polls, it is also an idea that is strongly supported by the public. Safe schools with high academic standards are now ranked among the nation's highest priorities.

But what exactly do people mean by "standards?" If the activities in the states are a fair indicator, it seems that everyone has a different idea of what standards should look like and what functions they are meant to serve. Some states are basing their standards in the academic subjects; others are not. Some states have short documents that fit entire subjects on one page; others have produced large volumes. Some are focusing on the skills students should acquire; others are combining academic content and skills. Some are mainly interested in defining what students should learn; others are just as interested in changing the way teachers teach.

The differences go on and on. And the resulting confusion is threatening to shift the momentum and erode support for a very good idea. In our view, only strong academic standards can provide the sturdy foundation we need to dramatically improve student achievement and win back the confidence of the public. We have already learned a lot from the standards-setting efforts in various states and districts, as well as from our own research into the academic standards that undergird the educational systems of several of the world's highest-achieving nations. Based on these lessons, and in an effort to bring some clarity and consensus to the standards-setting process, the AFT developed the following set of criteria.

Since these criteria were first published in the fall of 1994, they have been read widely. As the work on strengthening standards continues in states and communities across the country, we hope that these criteria will continue to be of use to teachers, parents and other interested citizens in their attempts to judge whether what has been put forward in the name of "standards" is good enough.

Of course, we should not expect that perfect standards will arise on the first try. It took other countries a long time to arrive at usable descriptions of the most essential knowledge and skills that they want their students to learn. We are not likely to be any different and should be prepared for a lengthy process of revision and refinement—not to mention a lot of hard work. This should not dissuade us from the task, however. Adopted and implemented with care, academic standards are a powerful tool for improving the American education system. It is in this spirit that we put forward these criteria.

1. Standards must focus on academics

This may seem obvious to many people, but it is important to stress the point. The purpose of setting standards is to improve students' academic performance. This should be the central mission of all our educational arrangements. Forging agreement around the academic content of the curriculum and the expectations we have for our children is the essential first step. If we can agree on what all students deserve to learn, we can focus our energies and resources on giving all kids the opportunities they need to read and write better; reach greater heights in math and science; and learn more about history, geography, literature, and the arts. These are the things that will make a difference in students' lives, and they are what parents care most about.

But there are some who would rather have standards focus on social and behavioral issues than on academics. Across the country, we've watched debates and legislative battles unfold around proposed education standards or "outcomes" that stray from or avoid academics. These efforts, frequently referred to as "outcomes-based education," or "OBE," are being challenged and defeated, and not only by religious fundamentalists but also by concerned parents, business people, educators, and other public school supporters who have raised serious questions about some of the stan-

dards that have been developed.

In several states, the intense negative reaction to nonacademic standards resulted in the substantial revision or defeat of the entire standards reform package. Here are a few examples from Virginia (where, in 1992, Governor Douglas Wilder abandoned the complete draft set of "Common Core of Learning" standards) and from Pennsylvania (where strong opposition prompted the state to significantly amend its draft "Student Learning Outcomes"):

> All students understand and appreciate their worth as unique and capable individuals and exhibit self-esteem *(Pennsylvania's Student Learning Outcomes, Draft 1991).*

> All students demonstrate caregiving skills and evaluate, in all settings, appropriate child care practices necessary to nurture children based on child development theory *(Pennsylvania's Student Learning Outcomes, Draft 1991).*

> [A] student who is becoming a fulfilled individual uses the fundamental skills of thinking, problem solving, communicating, quantifying, and collaborating...to analyze personal strengths and limitations to improve behaviors, capabilities, and plans *(Virginia's Common Core of Learning, Draft 1992).*

In contrast, the following excerpt from the recently revised national history standards is clearly grounded in academic content and represents the type of information that standards ought to convey:

> The student understands the causes of the American Revolution. Therefore, the student is able to:
>
> - Explain the consequences of the Seven Years War and the overhaul of English imperial policy following the Treaty of Paris in 1763.
> - Compare the arguments advanced by defenders and opponents of the new imperial policy on the traditional rights of English people and the legitimacy of asking the colonies to pay a share of the costs of empire.
> - Reconstruct the chronology of the critical events leading to the outbreak of armed conflict between the American colonies and England.
> - Analyze political, ideological, religious and economic origins of the Revolution.
> - Reconstruct the arguments among patriots and loyalists about independence and draw conclusions about how the decision to declare independence was reached.

As noted earlier, the program most responsible for giving standards a bad name is called "outcomes-based education" or OBE. Although it makes sense to organize our education system around the results—or outcomes—we hope it will produce, OBE's treatment of academic knowledge as a low priority doesn't sit well with most teachers and parents. OBE proponents served as key consultants to several state education departments over the last several years, and in each case the so-called "reform" proposal that resulted was met with significant opposition, largely because of the non-academic and controversial nature of the standards. Now, in a number of states, those opposed to any kind of standards development are trying to pin the "OBE" label on whatever effort is under way in an attempt to taint it. In reaction, states have begun to avoid terms like "outcomes" and "OBE" to describe what they're doing. Terminology, however, is not at the heart of the matter. In the end, it's the content of the standards that must be kept center stage.

Schools certainly have a role to play in helping students develop those traits essential to good behavior and strong character, such as compassion, honesty, self-discipline, and perseverance. And the standards-setting process can contribute to that mission by ensuring that all students have access to a solid academic curriculum, because moral education is a natural by-product of a good curriculum. As students weigh the dilemmas and compromises of history and learn about its heroes and villains; as they re-visit the great debates that have stirred mankind over the centuries; and as they confront the ethical issues that lie at the heart of so much of our great literature, their moral understandings will be greatly enriched.

In addition, of course, schools can contribute to the moral education of the young in other ways—for example, through their discipline policies; through their decisions about what to reward and recognize; and by the example they set as a community in which the virtues are both expected and honored. These are not matters, however, that lend themselves well to the standards-setting mechanism. They are best taken up by teachers,

parents, and the local or school community, coming together to find common ground in their hopes for their children.

2. Standards must be grounded in the core disciplines

Some educators argue that we should move away from traditional subject areas and create "interdisciplinary" expectations for students. "Human growth and development," "environmental stewardship," and "cultural and creative endeavors" are just some of the topics that have sprung up in place of math, science, history, and English. Proponents of this approach argue that solutions to "real-world" problems and issues cannot be based on one or another discipline, so, therefore, neither should standards.

This argument belies the purpose of standards, which is to focus our educational systems on *what* is most essential for students to learn, not to prescribe *how* the material should be taught. At its best, interdisciplinary education can be a stimulating approach to teaching the knowledge and skills that arise from the disciplines. But that content knowledge and those skills have to be defined first if interdisciplinary teaching is to be effective. That is the purpose of setting standards.

Strong standards in each of the core disciplines will ensure that interdisciplinary approaches to teaching reflect the depth and integrity of the disciplines involved. It is not enough for standards to simply touch upon or reference the disciplines. To be complete, a set of standards must embody the knowledge and habits of mind essential to each of the core subjects, and in our opinion, this cannot be accomplished by trying to fit disciplinary knowledge into broad over-arching categories such as "critical thinking" and "problem solving."

When standards-setters abandon the disciplines or significantly blur disciplinary boundaries, content often suffers. Standards become vaguely worded and loosely connected, making the job of curriculum designers, assessment developers, and teachers all but impossible. These are also the kinds of standards that parents and the public are least likely to understand and support.

In other words, no matter how interesting the teaching method, the subject matter must still be worthwhile for the approach to work. Strong standards in each of the core disciplines will ensure that interdisciplinary approaches reflect the depth and integrity of the disciplines involved.

* * *

In order to better prepare students for the job market after they finish school, some states and industry groups are developing "career" or "skill" standards separate from the core academic standards. In so far as these efforts help make clear to students the academic knowledge and skills they will need to get good jobs and build successful careers, skill standards will be serving a very useful purpose. Students are always asking how what they are learning in school is relevant to their later lives. By showing students, through the standards and curriculum, how good writing skills or trigonometry are used in the workplace, schools may have an easier time motivating students to work hard, and businesses may have better-prepared youngsters applying for jobs.

There is a real danger, however, that skill standards can have a very different effect than the one just described. If these standards become purely vocational in nature, and if they fail to make a strong connection to the academic subjects, the result will be a greater separation between the vocational and academic tracks in American high schools. Whether students plan to go to college, vocational training, or directly into the workforce after high school, there is a common core of academic knowledge and skills they will need to succeed. Skill standards either need to build in that academic core or they need to make clear references to a set of academic standards that does.

3. Standards must be specific enough to assure the development of a common core curriculum

We have already established that good standards are based in the academic disciplines, but being academic and subject based is not enough. A good set of standards should also outline the essential knowledge and skills that all students should learn in each subject area.

Such standards would guarantee that all students, regardless of background or neighborhood, are exposed to a common core of learning. This means putting an end to the unequal, uninspiring

curricula that many disadvantaged youngsters get locked into from an early age. A strong common core also would enable us to continue to forge a strong common culture, to preserve what unites us without diminishing the unique strength that flows from our diversity.

Requiring a common core would not, of course, limit students who choose to go beyond it to advanced-level high school courses in any of the academic subjects. Nor would it prevent a fruitful integration of the academic core with vocational or technical education at the upper-secondary level. But to the extent that a common core is established through most of the high school years—which is the practice abroad—we would ensure that all students are given a more equal chance to become well-educated citizens.

In addition, teachers would have a much clearer idea of what their students learned the year before, so they would not have to waste so much class time re-teaching previously covered material. And it would make life much easier on students who move from one school to another and often find themselves either way ahead or way behind the rest of the class.

With a common core in hand, we could—as other industrialized countries have done—end the need for every teacher to re-invent the wheel. Like other professionals, we could begin to accrue a more focused body of knowledge, a portfolio of good practice, of materials and options that teachers and teacher educators could draw from, adapt, add to, polish, and refine. But this is only possible if there is broad agreement on what is most essential to learn.

If standards are to set forth the content of a

Here are a few examples of standards that meet and do not meet the AFT criteria.

	Strong Standards	**Weak Standards**
English	Students should be able to develop a descriptive essay that depicts an object or event, maintains a consistent focus, uses a logical sequence, and elaborates each idea with specific details and vivid vocabulary. *(Grade 5)*	Students should be able to construct meaning through experiences with literature, cultural events and philosophical discussion. *(No grade level indicated)*
History	Students should be able to describe how United States federalism was transformed during the Great Depression by the policies of the New Deal and how that transformation continues to affect United States society today. *(Grade 9-12)*	Students should be able to understand, analyze, and interpret historical events, conditions, trends and issues to develop historical perspective. *(No further elaboration provided and no grade level indicated)*
Math	The student will differentiate between area and perimeter and identify whether the application of the concept of perimeter or area is appropriate for a given situation. *(Grade 5)*	Students should become mathematical problem solvers. To develop these abilities, students need the experience of working with diverse problem-solving situations. *(No grade level indicated)*
Science	Students should be able to describe the basic processes of photosynthesis and respiration and their importance to life. *(Grade 5)*	Students should be able to use basic science concepts to help understand various kinds of scientific information. *(Upper Elementary)*

common core, and if they are to be used by teachers, curriculum and assessment developers, textbook publishers, and others, they must be specific enough to guide these people in their activities. Unfortunately, many states' standards seem to be falling short in this regard, offering the barest guidance as to what should be covered. Some of the standards we've seen fit entire subjects on a single page. Others don't make any distinction between what elementary and secondary students should learn. One state's social studies standards mention that students should learn about the concept of "war and its many repercussions," but never specify which wars are most important for them to study. Such a guideline could lead to textbooks that cover the U.S. Revolution and the Civil War, assessments that cover World War I and World War II, and professional development and teacher education that stress Korea and Vietnam.

Though it has received a lot of attention for its reform efforts over the last several years, Kentucky is an example of a state whose standards were, until recently, too vague to guide local districts toward a core curriculum and matching, content-based assessments. Kentucky's original standards contained only five to ten statements of what students should learn in each subject area. Here, for example, is the complete list of Kentucky's original social studies standards:

2.14 Students understand the democratic principles of justice, equality, responsibility, and freedom and apply them to real-life situations.

2.15 Students can accurately describe various forms of government and analyze issues that relate to the rights and responsibilities of citizens in a democracy.

2.16 Students observe, analyze, and interpret human behaviors, social groupings, and institutions to better understand people and the relationships among individuals and among groups.

2.17 Students interact effectively and work cooperatively with the many ethnic and cultural groups of our nation and world.

2.18 Students understand economic principles and are able to make economic decisions that have consequences in daily living.

2.19 Students recognize and understand the relationship between people and geography and apply their knowledge in real-life situations.

2.20 Students understand, analyze, and interpret historical events, conditions, trends and issues to develop historical perspective.

To the state's credit, officials in Kentucky have decided that it is necessary to provide teachers, parents, and others with more clarity in terms of the academic content students are expected to learn. The original standards are, therefore, being fleshed out in greater detail, and should help to fill a hole in what is otherwise a very impressive state education reform effort.

In contrast, California has for years communicated its standards in terms of grade-by-grade curriculum frameworks, thus providing substantial, common, clear guidance to all the players in the educational system. Here, for example, is an excerpt from the California History/Social Science Framework describing what 11th graders should understand about the Great Depression:

Students should assess the likely causes of the Depression and examine its effects on ordinary people in different parts of the nation through use of historical materials. They should recognize the way in which natural drought combined with unwise agricultural practices to cause the Dust Bowl, a major factor in the economic and cultural chaos of the 1930s. They should see the linkage between severe economic distress and social turmoil. Photographs, films, newspaper accounts, interviews with persons who lived in the period, as well as paintings and novels (such as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*) will help students understand this critical era.

The administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt and his New Deal should be studied as an examination of the government's response to economic crisis. The efforts of the Roosevelt Administration to alleviate the crisis through the creation of social welfare programs, regulatory agencies, and economic planning bureaus should be carefully assessed.

Officials in California are trying to build on the information in the curriculum frameworks by developing complementary standards and assessments that all students will be expected to master.

How specific should standards be? There is no perfect formula. But it helps to keep in mind why we are setting standards in the first place and how

they will be used. Here are some questions worth asking about the standards in your state:

- Are the standards organized by grade levels or age bands, or do they in some way clearly delineate the differences in expectations for students at different ages or levels?
- Are the standards clear and specific enough to guide the development of curriculum frameworks that would describe the core units to be covered in every grade?
- If a state were to adopt these standards but give districts the responsibility for fleshing them out into a curriculum, what are the chances that students across the state would be learning the same core curriculum?
- If a student moved from one district to another or from school to school within a district, would these standards ease the transition and ensure that they were neither too far behind nor too far ahead?
- If a textbook publisher and an assessment developer were to use the standards in their work, is it likely that the text and the test would be well aligned?

4. Standards must be manageable given the constraints of time

Neither standards nor the resulting common core curriculum should try to cover everything to be taught. A core curriculum should probably constitute somewhere between 60 to 80 percent of the academic curriculum; the exact amount is open for discussion. The rest can be filled in by local districts, schools, and teachers.

It's important not to draw the wrong conclusions here: there is nothing sacred about the ways schools presently apportion their time. According to *Prisoners of Time*, the 1994 report by the National Education Commission on Time and Learning, American schools spend about half as much time on academics as their counterparts overseas. The average U.S. high school graduate spends only 40 percent of his time studying core academic subjects in his school career. There is no reason why these figures should be so low, and standards are the first necessary step toward initiating some changes in school schedules.

Nevertheless, as states begin to adopt standards, there undoubtedly will be competing demands for time in the curriculum—both within and among the disciplines. Standards-setters will need to exhibit restraint in the face of these pressures. Their job is to determine what is essential for students to learn. A laundry list that satisfies everyone will be self-defeating, leaving teachers right back where they are now—facing the impossible task of trying to rush through overstuffed textbooks and ridiculously long sets of curriculum objectives.

5. Standards must be rigorous and world class

Much of the discussion about education standards in recent years has focused on the need to bring American students up to "world-class" levels of achievement. As commonplace as this phrase has become, it is extremely important that we don't lose sight of what it actually means. It doesn't mean making standards a bit more rigorous than they were before. It doesn't mean asking teachers or parents what they think a "world-class" education should look like. And it doesn't mean reliance on the work of national standards-setting organizations that have not, themselves, arrived at an adequate definition of "world-class achievement."

For standards to be truly world class, they must establish expectations for American students that are at least as demanding as those set for students in other high-achieving countries. It means placing American standards side by side with the best the world has to offer and seeing how well they measure up. It means studying the actual curriculum frameworks, exams, and samples of student work from a variety of countries to determine what students around the world are expected to learn, at what age or grade level it is taught to them, how well they are expected to know it, and the means by which they are asked to demonstrate that knowledge.

If standards truly are rigorous and world class, they should stand up to some tough but sensible questions:

- Do they reflect various levels of knowledge and skills comparable to what students in high-achieving countries are expected to master?
- Which countries did the standards-setters use as a basis for comparison, and what documents

from these countries did they look at to determine their standards?

■ Will the standards lead to a core curriculum for all students—those headed for college and those headed for work—as demanding as those in France or Japan?

■ Are the standards as rigorous as those reflected in the French *Brevet de College* and the German *Realschule* exams, a standard met by two-thirds of students in those countries?

■ Will they result in assessments for the college bound as rigorous as the German *Abitur*, the French *Baccalauréat* exams, the British A-levels, or the Japanese university entrance exams?

■ Did the standards-setters refer to internationally benchmarked curricula and exams such as those of the International Baccalaureate program?

■ What about the best programs and resources available in the U.S., such as the College Board's advanced-placement exams and achievement tests (now called the SAT II)?

In our 1996 report on the quality of state standards (*Making Standards Matter*, August 1996), the AFT asked officials in all fifty states whether they looked at the expectations in other countries while developing their standards. Only twelve states had done this in any measurable way, and most of those had only done so in one or two subjects.

Everyone involved in developing standards, whether at the national, state, or local level, must take this benchmarking issue seriously. Information on other countries is not easy to obtain, but it is absolutely essential that we do a better job of it if our standards are going to help students achieve their maximum potential. Nothing will be accomplished by setting standards that are too low. Yet without honest international benchmarking, we will be captives of our own parochial notions of what students can accomplish, and low standards may very well be the result.

6. Standards must include 'performance standards'

In recent polls, most AFT teachers agreed that students, across the board, are capable of doing better work and mastering more demanding material than they currently are. Teachers also cited the lack of student motivation as one of the biggest problems they face in their classrooms. In any profession, specific standards are developed in order to measure competence and performance, and these standards give people something specific to aim for. Whether you look at the medical boards that prospective doctors must pass, the bar exams for lawyers, or the time trials for drivers to qualify for the Indianapolis 500—performance is never dealt with in the abstract. For example, Indy racers are not simply told that "very fast driving" will qualify them for the big race. They know exactly what times they need to beat, and they plan their strategies accordingly.

It should be the same for education standards. An influential report commissioned by the National Education Goals Panel, *Promises To Keep: Creating High Standards for American Students*, asserted that a complete set of standards should describe both *what* students should know and be able to do and *how well* they must know and do it. The report separated these functions into two distinct categories—content standards and performance standards. Content standards should define the knowledge (the most important and enduring ideas, concepts, issues, dilemmas, and information) and skills (the ways of thinking, working, communicating, reasoning, and investigating) essential to each discipline. Performance standards should specify "how good is good enough." They should show how competent a student demonstration must be to indicate achievement of the content standards.

Most states began the standards-setting process by developing content standards. A few states made it clear that the next step would be to develop performance standards, but until very recently, there weren't any examples to look at. In an attempt to define "how good is good enough," a handful of states have now begun to put together sample assessment questions and samples of student work that "meet" the content standards. The most effective examples not only show competent student work but also explain why that work meets the standards. Oregon is one of the states farthest along in this process, but there is still plenty of work to be done.

7. Standards must define multiple levels of performance for students to strive for

Standards are not merely meant to measure what students are learning but also to motivate them to excel. Youngsters should be able to look to academic standards as a goal, something to work toward, to strive for; something that will challenge them, no matter how far ahead or behind they may be. Standards that are too easy to reach won't require students to work hard. On the other hand, students will be discouraged from trying at all if the standards are so high that they seem out of reach. All students need to be able to look at a set of academic standards and say "these are challenging, but I think I can reach them if I work hard and put my mind to it."

Considering the range of achievement among students, they won't all be inspired by the same level of performance. What may seem very challenging to some is bound to look easy to others. Title I of the *Improving America's Schools Act* recognizes this. It requires states and districts to define multiple degrees of mastery of the content standards (e.g., partially proficient, proficient, advanced) and to report achievement that way from elementary school onward. This will be helpful to students, parents, and teachers who will want to know—beyond just "pass or fail"—how well students are doing in relation to the content standards. It will also help schools and districts target resources to those students in most need of support and track their progress against a set of clear benchmarks.

What's not necessarily required in Title I—but is very important for states and districts to do—is to make clear to parents, teachers, students, and others what the different performance levels mean. What should an "advanced" high school student's writing look like? How does that compare to "proficient" and "partially proficient" writing? What kinds of math problems should students who are considered "proficient" be able to solve in elementary school? In middle school? In high school? States and districts have to begin putting concrete examples of student work out there in the public view if their standards are going to mean anything to anyone.

Defining multiple degrees of performance standards does *not* mean having low standards for some students and high standards for others. The minimum acceptable level of performance needs to be much more demanding than what many students are achieving today, and no child should be able to slip through the cracks. The goal is to significantly raise the floor while also raising the ceiling.

Another important way to make sure standards motivate all students is to encourage specialization at some point in high school. All students should be required to meet the same core content standards in elementary and middle school and through a certain point in high school. Some may take longer than others, and there should always be second and third chances, but they should all reach the core standards.

Once they've mastered the common core, students should have the opportunity to pursue different courses of study depending on their strengths and interests, and those courses should be directly linked to students' postsecondary and career aspirations. Students who want to go on to college should know what types of courses they will need to take in order to be well prepared, and there should be a clear set of standards for them to work toward before graduating. Those who want to pursue further technical training after high school, but are not interested in a four-year college, should also know which courses and standards will help further their careers. And those who intend to go directly into the job market should have at least mastered the core content standards before getting a diploma—a step, when met, that will significantly raise the achievement levels and life chances of these youngsters.

The point here is that not all high school students are going to be challenged by and interested in the same courses and standards. Again, this is not a way of setting up low standards for some students and high standards for others. They should all be high. In fact, the core content standards should reflect a level of understanding and achievement that is much higher than what's considered "minimum competency" today. It is shameful to let students graduate from high school by passing tests based on 7th-, 8th-, or 9th-grade knowledge and skills.

8. Standards must combine knowledge and skills, not pursue one at the expense of the other

There is a terrible myth in education that has a tendency to confuse important decisions affecting curriculum and that is threatening to strangle the standards movement. The theory goes something like this: Knowledge is dynamic, transient, always changing, whereas the need to apply knowledge is constant. What is most important for students to learn are skills such as problem solving, decision making, and higher-order thinking, so that they can react to any situation, gain and use whatever knowledge they need, and not waste their time learning facts and theories that may turn out to be irrelevant to their lives. Who can be sure of how much specific knowledge each person will really need in the "real world" anyway?

Of course this is overstated, but not by much. At the root of this myth is a false dichotomy between knowledge and skills. And what it is leading to are standards that neglect the subject matter (the facts, ideas, concepts, issues, and information) of the traditional academic disciplines that are needed to develop the skills in the first place. Consider the following very general "skills" standards:

> Students should be able to use critical and creative thinking skills to respond to unanticipated situations and recurring problems. *(Connecticut's Common Core of Learning, 1987)*

> Students should know reading strategies are tools for constructing meaning, thinking critically, and solving problems. *(Arkansas' Reading Curriculum Framework, 1995)*

> Students will demonstrate the ability to examine problems and proposed solutions from multiple perspectives. *(Missouri's Standards, Draft 1995)*

These examples may seem harmless enough, but they leave unanswered just what it is students are to solve, decide, or think about. What is the subject? Where is the content? The unyielding facts and ideas? And how are students to learn how to learn without learning something concrete first? Let's turn the issue around: Is it possible to name a problem to be solved, a decision to be made, or a thing to be thought about that is not tied to subject matter?

And what kind of guidance do "standards" such as those cited above give to teachers and others in education? "Critical thinking" cannot be taught in the abstract. Students *are* taught to think critically, however, when they are given something challenging to think about, such as: Analyze the contradiction between the principle expressed in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal" and the existence of slavery at the time.

Good standards will ensure that students develop the intellectual powers of observation, communication, reasoning, reflection, judgment, perspective, and synthesis that are often lumped under vague phrases like "higher-order" or "critical thinking." But they must pursue these skills through the content of the subject areas. Skills that are cut free from content and context are meaningless—and impossible to teach or assess.

An overemphasis on generic skills and processes seems to be a particular trend in states that favor local control of the entire curriculum. In essence, this is a way for states to avoid making judgments about the core content of the curriculum. But as discussed earlier, vague, content-free standards accomplish nothing. They do not ensure that all children will have access to a challenging curriculum, nor can they lead to assessments that reveal the depth and breadth of student knowledge.

9. Standards must not dictate how the material should be taught

Good standards are designed to guide, not to limit, instruction. They are intended to communicate to teachers and other school staff what is most important for students to learn, but not how the ideas or information should be taught. If, for example, a set of standards includes teaching activities, they should be there for illustrative purposes only. It is important that standards are not allowed to infringe on teachers' professional responsibilities, their ability to choose their particular teaching methods and to design their lessons in ways that reflect the best available research and that are best suited to their students' needs.

10. Standards must be written clearly enough for all stakeholders to understand

Part of the challenge states face when developing standards is how to generate broad, public support. It is important, therefore, that standards not be written solely for an education audience. The standards must be written clearly enough for parents, students, and interested community members to understand—indeed, to be inspired by. Otherwise, standards developers will risk alienating the very people whose trust and support they need.

We've already pointed out a number of ways that standards can go astray and cause friction. Non-academic or interdisciplinary standards aren't clear to the public and often engender distrust. Vague standards do not communicate anything and usually raise more questions than they answer. Standards that emphasize skills at the expense of content knowledge are treated with deserved skepticism by parents. The list goes on. Sometimes, something as simple as a word or phrase that has no meaning to parents can cause a problem.

Our best advice to writers of standards is to consider what the language of each standard will mean to everyone who will be reading it. Avoid jargon. Are the standards clear enough for teachers to understand what is required of them and their students? For parents to understand what is expected of their children and to keep an eye on their progress? Do the standards send a coherent message to employers and colleges as to what students will know and be able to do when they leave high school? What about the students themselves? Will they be able to read the standards and get a clear idea of what is expected of them?

If the answer to any of these questions is "no," your work is not done. If a standard seems confusing to lay people, it needs to be re-thought and re-written. Examples of what to avoid:

> All students understand human development theories across the lifespan and value individual uniqueness in the context of family life. *(Pennsylvania's Student Learning Outcomes, Draft 1991)*

> [A high school graduate] understands and describes ways that a specified culture shapes patterns of interaction of individuals and groups. *(Minnesota's High School Standards, Draft 1994)*

> Students will demonstrate the ability to develop and apply strategies based on one's own experience in preventing or solving problems. *(Missouri's Standards, Draft 1995)*

The threshold of a great opportunity

Subject matter standards and a common core curriculum are new concepts in American education, and people—including many educators—are often skeptical of new ideas in the field. Considering the fads and failures of the past, this skepticism is certainly healthy. But the AFT and others believe that if we develop rigorous academic standards and use those to guide us in everything else we do in our schools, we have a real opportunity to make substantial improvements in the way we educate our children. Such an effort is certainly a more palatable and responsible strategy than turning the schools over to the whim of the market.

APPENDIX C:

Four Promising Programs For Raising Student Achievement

Why are some schools effective at educating most students, even those from disadvantaged high-poverty areas, while others struggle fruitlessly to fulfill their academic mission? How can schools replicate the successes of their more effective counterparts?

Researchers, working for years to answer these questions, have described the characteristics of successful schools—e.g., high expectations for all students; challenging curricula; clear standards and a coherent, focused academic mission; high-quality professional development aligned to the standards; small class sizes, especially in the early grades; an orderly and disciplined learning environment; a supportive and collegial atmosphere; an intervention system designed to ensure that struggling students can meet the standards. But, while we now know a great deal about *which* reforms are effective, comparatively little is known about *how* to achieve them.

As many schools have found out the hard way, systemic reform is extremely difficult—especially when it must occur simultaneously on many fronts, and is begun without the benefit of high-quality curriculum materials, appropriate professional development, or readily-available technical assistance. In fact, a number of schools—especially those that are already foundering—have found that lasting improvement is impossible without concrete, step-by-step implementation support.

According to a recent study of efforts to raise academic achievement for at-risk students (Stringfield, Millsap, Scott, and Herman, 1996), the reform strategies that achieve the greatest academic gains are those chosen and supported by faculty, as well as administrators. Success is also dependent on the existence of a challenging curriculum, and on paying "a great deal of attention to issues of initial and long-term implementation, and to institutionalizing the reforms." This and other studies have also found that schoolwide reforms tend to be more effective than pull-out or patchwork programs, and that externally developed programs—particularly those with support networks from which schools can draw strength and tangible assistance—tend to do better than local designs.

Given these and similar research findings, we developed the criteria below to help identify promising programs for raising student achievement, especially in low-performing schools. You will find descriptions of four of these programs on the following pages.

All four programs attempt *schoolwide* improvement, offer the kinds of materials, tools and training that increase the likelihood of effective replication, and primarily affect curriculum and pedagogy—the areas over which faculty have the most control. Although each particular program has its own strengths and weaknesses, all show evidence of:

- **High Standards.** The program helps all students acquire the skills and/or knowledge they need to successfully perform to high academic standards.
- **Effectiveness.** The program has proven to be effective in raising the academic achievement levels of "at-risk" students in low-performing schools, based on *independent* evaluations.
- **Replicability.** The program has been *effectively* implemented in multiple sites beyond the original pilot school(s).
- **Support Structures**. Professional development, materials, and ongoing implementation support are available for the program, either through the program's developer, independent contractors, or dissemination networks established by schools already in the program.

Success for All (SFA)

Grades Covered	Elementary/K-6.
Curriculum Materials	Curriculum guides, curriculum materials, children's literature, daily lesson plans, and teacher manuals are provided for grades K-6 in reading, writing, and language arts.
Instructional Support/ Professional Development	Through lesson plans and teacher manuals, specific instructional guidance is provided for each part of the curriculum. Professional development is also provided as a part of the basic cost of the program, with pre- and post-implementation workshops for all instructional staff. In addition, advanced training is provided for the principal and a "program facilitator," who works as an on-site coach/coordinator in the school.
School Reform/ Restructuring Assistance	This is a schoolwide restructuring program, that affects curriculum, pedagogy, scheduling, resource allocation, professional development, and family support services. To help ensure success, a clear commitment on the part of administrators and a secret ballot endorsement by at least 80 percent of the school staff is a required part of the application process. Once accepted, schools receive implementation assistance and training, as well as continuing support through a "network" with researchers and other SFA schools.
Role of Paraprofessionals	To some extent, the deployment of classroom paraprofessionals is determined at the school level. SFA recommends their use as classroom aides in pre-K and K and as one-on-one tutors working under the direction of certified teachers with students with mild reading difficulties.
Cost of Implementation	Most Success for All schools have funded the program as a Title I schoolwide project. For a school with 500 students, SFA estimates the first-year implementation costs to be $90-$100 per student for training, materials, and follow-up visits.[1] If the facilitator, tutor, and other SFA-related staff positions cannot be filled by a redeployment of existing staff, the costs related to the hiring of additional staff may range between $450 to $1,100 per student.
Results*/Effect Size[2]	Reading (+.34 to +.82); Word Attack (+.51 to +4.22).[3] ** To give a sense of scale, an effect size of +1.00 would be equivalent to an increase of 100 points on the SAT scale or 15 points of IQ—enough to move a student from the 20th percentile (the normal level of performance for children in poverty) to above the 50th percentile (the norm for mainstream students).*

Success for All (SFA) is an elementary school restructuring program, designed to deliver intensive academic assistance to student populations at risk of school failure. Developed in the mid-1980s by Dr. Robert Slavin, a researcher at Johns Hopkins University, SFA will be in place in more than 750 (mostly high-poverty Title I)[4] schools across the country, as of fall 1997. Because learning to read has been shown to be critical for academic success, the program was built around research into the most effec-

tive ways to teach reading and safeguards to catch and correct problems early.

Main Features

Reading and Writing Program—The core of Success for All is a reading curriculum that incorporates research-based instructional practices, including cooperative learning. In kindergarten and grade 1, the program emphasizes reading readiness and the development of oral language. Students work on phonemic awareness activities to help develop auditory discrimination; become familiar with books, letters and phonetically-regular words; and listen to, retell, and dramatize children's literature and thematic units based in science and history. When students reach the primer level, they use an adaptation of another Johns Hopkins University-developed program: Cooperative Integrated Reading and Composition (CIRC). In addition to receiving direct instruction from teachers in reading comprehension and writing, SFA and CIRC students engage in cooperative learning activities built around oral reading in pairs, structured discussion, summarization and retelling of stories, vocabulary building, decoding practice, and story-related writing. Detailed teachers' manuals and support materials, through grade 6, are built around children's literature and the most widely used basals and anthologies. Classroom libraries of trade books at the students' reading level are provided to each teacher, along with support materials.

Reading Groups—Although heterogeneous, age-grouped classes are conducted most of the day, students in grades 1-3 (and sometimes 4-5 or 4-6) are regrouped for reading. A common, 90-minute reading period is established across grades, during which students are regrouped by reading performance level. By establishing a common period and using all certified staff (including tutors, librarians, art teachers, etc.), class size for these groups is substantially below the size of homeroom classes. By eliminating the need for multiple reading groups, direct instruction time is increased and student busywork is decreased, thus accelerating the pace of learning.

Frequent Assessments—Every eight weeks, reading teachers assess student progress using personal observations and curriculum-based and formal measures. Teachers use the results of these assessments to identify students who are falling behind and need extra help and tutoring, as well as those who are progressing quickly and should be placed in a higher performance group. At the same time, teachers attempt to identify students who need other types of assistance, such as family interventions or screening for hearing or vision problems.

Tutors—Another important element in the program is the use of one-on-one tutoring, the most effective form of instruction, for students with reading problems. Tutors are certified teachers who are reading specialists or have experience teaching Title I or special education students. Trained paraprofessionals may also be used for students with less severe reading difficulties, under direction of the certified tutor. Children with reading difficulties are tutored during a 20-minute period during the day when neither reading nor math is being taught in class. To prevent problems from developing and to minimize the number of older students needing remediation, first-grade students are given priority for tutoring. Certified tutors also act as regular reading teachers during the 90-minute reading periods.

Program Facilitator—Another key element of the program is the use of a program facilitator at each school. A member of the school staff who is released from regular classroom responsibilities, the facilitator works (with the principal) to oversee the details of implementation, including scheduling changes and professional development arrangements. The facilitator also monitors the implementation of the curriculum in the classroom, and is available to assist/coach individual teachers and tutors through any problems. He or she will also help deal with student behavior problems and act as a liaison between the staff and the family support team.

Training—The professional development provided by Success for All includes a brief initial orientation and training period, in-class coaching and assistance, and periodic inservice workshops and discussion groups. In the first year of implementation, three days of inservice training are provided for all teachers, tutors, and classroom paraprofessionals at the beginning of the school year. The initial training for both

the facilitator and the principal is more comprehensive, usually a weeklong training session at Johns Hopkins University. Throughout the year, researchers make frequent site visits during which they make classroom observations, meet with staff, and conduct inservice training. Facilitators also arrange sessions for staff to share information, discuss problems and solutions, and collaborate on the needs of individual children.

Family Support Team—The family support team consists of the facilitator, parent liaison (if any), counselor (if any), principal or vice principal (if any), and any other staff the school deems appropriate. The team promotes parental involvement in the school—providing information, organizing school-related activities, and conducting workshops for parents. It also intervenes to help solve behavior and other problems, acts as a resource for teachers and parents, and helps coordinate services with community-based health, social service, and juvenile justice agencies.

Results

Not only is Success for All designed around research into effective teaching methods, but the program itself has an extensive body of research demonstrating its effectiveness. Statistically significant positive effects have been found on every measure from grades 1 to 5, with especially large gains for students most at risk for failure. These effects have also been shown to be cumulative: While first-grade SFA students are about three months ahead of matched control students in reading, by the fifth grade, they outscore control students by an average of a full grade level. Bilingual students and students in the lowest quartile of their grades average even higher gains, with effect size changes of +1.00 or more (*see footnote 2*).

The program has also been found to cut special education placements in half, on average, and one study found that the program eliminated the black-white achievement gap.

Case Studies

Baltimore, Maryland. The birthplace of Success for All, Baltimore has five of the longest-running SFA implementations in the country. The schools are located in inner-city, predominantly African-American neighborhoods, with between 75 percent to 96 percent of students eligible for school lunch subsidies. On average, SFA schools outperform control schools in the city at every grade level. For example, CTBS scores for SFA and control schools were collected during the 1992-93 school year. By the fifth grade, SFA students were found to be 75 percent of a grade equivalent ahead of control students on the CTBS Total Reading assessment. Evaluations have also found positive effects on attendance and retention rates.

Houston, Texas. In Houston, a recent experiment in the large-scale replication of Success for All has also shown positive results. What began in 1993 as a special summer school program, offered by the school district, was quickly expanded into a reform option for all elementary schools. By the 1994-95 school year, more than 70 schools had chosen to participate. Unfortunately, with the quick start-up, many schools did not receive the necessary training and materials before the beginning of the school year. Despite these widespread implementation problems, the Houston experiment appears to be working. According to a preliminary study by the University of Memphis, SFA's median first-year results varied from ES=+.15 to +.33 (*see footnote 2*) in Houston, largely depending on whether all of the program's features had been faithfully implemented. Although lower than the achievement gains reported in previous studies of smaller-scale implementations, these results still demonstrate a statistically significant improvement.

Considerations

Although the research on Success for All is overwhelming in proving its effectiveness, any successful implementation will require a substantial commitment in funding, staff time, and school restructuring work. Because this program was developed for, and is primarily used by, high-poverty Title I schools, some have the idea that the program is primarily remedial (interpreted to mean "dumbed down"). The truth however, is that SFA's developers went out of their way to strike a workable balance between challenging content and the acquisition of basic skills, incorporating everything from guided skill instruction to basals to children's classics such as *Charlotte's Web*. As such, it should be considered by any elementary school, across the demo-

graphic range, that needs to boost reading scores and student achievement levels.

Although the costs of implementation are high, the reallocation of existing Title I funds and the redeployment of existing staff can make it affordable, even in high-poverty schools and districts. For example, a school that already has four Title I teachers could train one to be the SFA facilitator, while the other three become reading teachers/tutors.

Another tradeoff arises from Success for All's intensive focus on reading in the primary grades. This could result in less money for other programs and activities, and more resources allocated for grades 1-3 versus grades 4-6. But while some of these trade-offs may be difficult, research and common sense tell us that the best, most cost-effective academic intervention program is one that prevents students from falling behind in the first place. For long-term success, it is critical that young students be provided with a firm academic foundation. The ability to read with ease and comprehension is the bedrock upon which that foundation is built. This program has proven it can help schools accomplish this goal.

Publications/Resources

Robert E. Slavin, Nancy A. Madden, Lawrence, J. Dolan and Barbara A. Wasik. *Every Child, Every School: Success for All* (1996). Thousand Oaks: Corwin Press, Inc. 805/499-9774.

Robert E. Slavin, et al. "Whenever and Wherever We Choose: The Replication of Success for All," *Phi Delta Kappan* (April 1994).

Robert E. Slavin, et al. "Preventing Early School Failure: What Works," *Educational Leadership*, (December 1992/January 1993).

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Per-pupil costs may be lower in multischool implementations.

An effect size is a standard means of expressing achievement gains and losses across studies, showing differences between experimental and control groups in terms of standard deviation. An effect size of +1.00 indicates that the experimental group outperformed the control group by one full standard deviation. To give a sense of scale, this would be equivalent to an increase of 100 points on the SAT scale, two stanines, 21 NCEs (normal curve equivalent ranks) or 15 points of IQ (Fashola and Slavin, 1996)—enough to move a student from the 20th percentile (the normal level of performance for children in poverty) to above the 50th percentile (in range with mainstream America). Because of differences among study designs and assessments, this can only be considered a "rough" measure of comparison. In general, an effect size of +.25 or more is considered to be educationally significant.

Slavin, Madden, Dolan, Wasik, Ross, and Smith, 1994; Slavin, Madden Karweit, Liverman, and Dolan, 1990. Note: reading results data are pooled scores from all interventions, 1988-1993, with scores rising through each successive year of implementation.

Roots and Wings, a program to supplement the Success for All reading and language arts curriculum with curricula in math, social studies, and science for grades K-6, has also been developed through New American Schools Designs. Preliminary results are promising.

Nunnery, Ross, and Smith, 1996

High Schools that Work (HSTW)

Grades Covered	High school/9-12.
Curriculum Materials	Limited pilot studies of new student curricula are being conducted.
Instructional Support/ Professional Development	HSTW schools are invited to participate in the program's annual professional development conference. Schools also receive a set of staff development guides on subjects ranging from assessment to site-based management, publications on successful practices, and a newsletter. A video series to support implementation of the program's "key practices" also is available; and schools can participate in an annual video teleconference on key implementation issues, for which study guides are distributed.
School Reform/ Restructuring Assistance	The program provides a framework, technical assistance, and a support network to help schools make the necessary changes in curricula, scheduling, resource allocation, and professional development. Support for systemic reform is offered at the state and district level through formal working relationships with education officials. Feedback from test, survey, and site-visit data, gathered in conjunction with the HSTW evaluation process, are made available to schools; as are recommendations for improvement. Assistance in identifying new funding sources also is provided.
Role of Paraprofessionals	Use of paraprofessionals is determined at the school level.
Cost of Implementation	Although HSTW funding varies greatly from state to state and school to school, the program recommends that $15,000-$20,000 in discretionary funding be devoted to implementation. Priority expenditures are for staff development, common planning time, and extra help for struggling students. Depending on the career focus, extra funds may be needed for new materials, equipment, technology, laboratories, etc.
Results	In addition to other assessments, HSTW schools use a battery of tests drawn from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). In 1993, 96 schools participated, resulting in a mean reading score of 267.1, a mean math score of 284.8, and a mean science score of 269.5. By 1996, scores had risen to 272.9 in reading, 285.3 in math, and 283.3 in science—significantly higher than NAEP national mean scores for vocational students of 266.6, 276.7 and 266.7 respectively.[1] Schools which faithfully implement all of the program components showed the most dramatic gains, with scores approaching those achieved by the nation's college-bound students.[2]

High Schools that Work (HSTW), a project of the Southern Regional Education Board, was designed to help states raise the academic achievement levels of career-bound students.[3] As such, it historically has worked with and through state education departments, with an emphasis on connecting the school house, district office, and state in a long-term collaborative effort. An HSTW coordinator, employed by the state, is trained to facilitate and oversee most aspects of the program, including implementation support and technical assistance site visits, which are conducted at least every three years.

The main goal of the program is to help participating schools replace their general and vocational tracks with an academic core of high-level math, science, and English courses, integrated with quality vocational studies, thus helping to raise achievement and broaden students' educational and career opportunities. The program, begun in 1987, is now being used in more than 650 schools in 21 states.

Main Features

Working with state education departments, school systems, and school staff, HSTW attempts to help schools implement 10 "key practices" for accelerating student achievement:

High Expectations—Establish high expectations and standards for general and vocational education students, which are clear and understood by all stakeholders—including students, parents, school staff, and the business community.

Vocational Studies—Increase access to intellectually challenging vocational and technical courses, with a major emphasis on preparation for continuing education and on developing the high-level mathematics, science, language arts, and problem-solving competencies necessary to function well in today's workplace.

Academic Studies—Increase access to core academic courses from the college-preparatory curriculum, using functional and applied strategies that enable students to see the relationship between course content and future employment opportunities.

Program of Study—Increase graduation requirements for general and vocational track students to include four years of college-preparatory English, three years each of math and science (with at least two years in each subject area of equivalent content to courses offered in the college-prep program), and a major concentration composed of at least four Carnegie units in a broad technical or academic course of study and at least two Carnegie units in related technical or academic courses.

Work-Based Learning—Provide students with a structured system of work-based and high-status school-based learning—high school and postsecondary—collaboratively planned by educators, employers, and workers, and resulting in an industry-recognized credential and employment opportunities in a career pathway.

Common Planning—Provide the organizational structure, staff development, and time that allow academic and vocational teachers to work together in planning and providing integrated instruction in high-status academic and technical content.

Student Engagement—Tailor instructional practices to foster more active engagement in learning on the part of students.

Guidance—Involve each student and his or her parent(s) in a career guidance and individual counseling system that can help students focus on completing an accelerated program of study with a career or academic major.

Extra Help—Establish a structured system to provide the extra assistance and support that can help career-bound students successfully complete an accelerated program of study that includes challenging academic content and a major.

Keeping Score—Use student assessment and program evaluation data to continuously improve curriculum, instruction, school climate, organization, and management—with the goal of raising student achievement.

Results

With permission from the NAEP Governing Board, HSTW administers a battery of tests to students in reading, mathematics, and science, which are drawn from and normed against NAEP assessments. This has allowed the program to gauge schools' progress longitudinally as well as in reference to national norms. Test results (gathered in 1990, 1993, 1994, and 1996) show both substantive overall gains and large variances among school sites. Mean scores for all 514 sites participating in the 1996 assessments show that HSTW students significantly outperform vocational education students nationally: *HSTW* 272.6 (reading), 285.2 (math), 282.6 (science); *national* 266.6 (reading), 276.7 (math), and 266.7 (science).[4] The assessments also show that the key variable among the highest- and lowest-performing HSTW schools is not pre-program scores or number of years in the program, but the extent to which schools have actually implemented the program's "key practices."

Concurrent with the NAEP assessments (now on a two-year schedule), the program has also commissioned independent student, teacher, and administrator surveys for each school, as well as transcript analyses comparing the actual level of course offerings

against program goals. On the off-years (beginning in 1997), studies of the educational and career status of first-year graduates will also be conducted.

Case Studies

St. Mary's County Technical Center (St. Mary's County, Maryland). In 1988, St. Mary's County Technical Center adopted the HSTW program. An underutilized vocational education facility, held in low regard by the local business community, the high school had become a dumping ground for the county's discipline problems. In addition to the large number of students who lacked basic literacy skills, 34 percent of students were discipline referrals and 34 percent were classified as "special education." In accordance with HSTW, the school's curriculum was revamped. The general track was eliminated, and academic requirements were strengthened. The vocational program was also beefed up, with the incorporation of applied learning courses and the expectation that all students were being prepared for postsecondary training. Interim results are positive. In 1990-91, senior SAT scores averaged 869. By 1994-95, with a similar student population and 50 percent more students taking the test, SAT scores had jumped 70 points to an average of 939. During those years, the dropout rate also fell from 7.2 percent to 3.6 percent, enrollment went up, and discipline problems were cut by half.

Sussex Technical High School (Georgetown, Delaware). Sussex Technical High School, located in rural southern Delaware, opened in 1961 to serve part-time students from seven independent "feeder" districts. By the mid-1980s, serious problems were evident. Enrollment, test scores, and student expectations were all low and getting lower. In 1991, Sussex Tech opened as a redesigned HSTW school. The general track was eliminated, graduation requirements were raised, and challenging academic and vocational courses were introduced. The lowest-scoring school to participate in HSTW's 1990 assessments, by 1996 Sussex had managed to take a similar group of students and raise the school's score to above the HSTW mean for all subjects tested (reading, math, and science). In 1994, only 8 percent of students took the SAT, with a combined average score of 790. In 1996, 28 percent of students chose to take the test, with a combined average score of 876.

Considerations

While the research on this program is still preliminary, it is clear that a large number of schools have been helped to make the kinds of substantive reforms which lead to higher student achievement. A significant percentage, however, have yet to show meaningful improvement. According to data collected by the program in 1996, one-third of career-bound students at participating sites were still enrolled in watered-down academic courses. Half were enrolled in vocational courses that lacked challenging assignments and projects.

HSTW has responded to these implementation problems by beefing-up technical assistance services to school sites. One important problem has yet to be addressed, however. Understanding that systemic reform is crucial to long-term success, thus far, only schools from partnership states have been allowed formal participation in the program.[7] As a part of the implementation process, state education officials are asked to assume much of the responsibility for program dissemination, oversight, and monitoring, while district and school administrators are asked to commit to the program and its "key practices." Yet there appears to be little if any direct contact with the majority of school staff until they are being trained to implement the program. In other words, the program depends on competence and support at multiple bureaucratic levels, while having no formal mechanism to ensure staff "buy-in" at individual school sites. Thus, some schools have embraced the program as a ray of hope, while others may regard it as yet another in a long line of futile, top-down "reform" schemes. In discussions, HSTW officials have expressed interest in opening up the program to reform-minded school districts in non-partnership states. The program has also begun to organize an urban network to help provide support to districts with multiple HSTW sites. Whether formal participation by individual schools will be allowed—no matter how committed and supportive staff members may be—is still far from certain.

Despite glitches, HSTW has many obvious strengths: It is designed to help students achieve to high standards. It gives proper focus to—and helps provide—high-quality professional development. It stresses the need for a structured support system for struggling students. It helps to define, upgrade, and mesh essential academic and vocational skills. It provides a system of student assessment, data-collection,

and feedback that can help spur continuous improvement. It offers assistance in obtaining business and community support. And it provides a post-implementation support network for all participating schools.

Given these benefits, local unions and interested technical and vocational schools outside of the 21 partner states may want to consider approaching state and/or district administrators about official adoption of the program. To help support successful replications, local initiatives to ensure that staff members at each participating school are fully informed, supportive, and involved—prior to implementation—should also be considered.

Publications/Resources

Gene Bottoms, Alice Presson, and Mary Johnson. *Making High Schools Work Through Integration of Academic and Vocational Education* (1992). Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board.

Gene Bottoms and Deede Sharpe. *Teaching for Understanding through Integration of Academic and Technical Education* (1996). Atlanta: Southern Regional Education Board.

Reaching the Next Step: How School to Career Can Help Students Reach High Academic Standards and Prepare for Good Jobs (1997). American Federation of Teachers.

For more information, contact: High Schools that Work, Southern Regional Education Board, 592 Tenth Street, NW, Atlanta, GA 30318.
Phone: 404/875-9211.
Fax: 404/872-1477
Internet: http://www.peach.net/sreb/hstw/high.html

Differences in achievement are statistically significant at the 1.3 level for reading, the 1.6 level for mathematics, and the 1.5 level for science.

The most recent national NAEP scores for college-bound students are 302.4 for reading (1992), 316.8 for mathematics (1992) and 306.8 for science (1990).

In this context, "career-bound students" are defined as those who, upon entering high school, do not intend to prepare for admission to a four-year college.

See footnote 1.

As of 1997, the 21 official partnership states were: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

Direct Instruction (DI)

Grades Covered	Primarily an elementary school (pre-K-6) program, but also used successfully with secondary and adult special education and remedial students.
Curriculum Materials	Curricular materials, daily lessons, and teacher's guides are available for grades K-6 in reading, language arts, spelling and math; grades 4-6 in expressive writing; grades 3-6 in science; grades 3-12 in corrective reading; and grades 4-12 in corrective math.[1]
Instructional Support/ Professional Development	Professional development and implementation support of differing levels of quality can be contracted from various providers. At times, the program's scripted teachers' guides have been used in lieu of—rather than in addition to—adequate professional development, giving rise to criticism of the program for being "teacher-proof."
School Reform/ Restructuring Assistance	Limited assistance can be contracted from some providers as part of their implementation-support package.
Role of Paraprofessionals	Trained classroom paraprofessionals are fully integrated into the program, working as instructional aides, one-on-one tutors, and small group leaders under the direction of certified teachers.
Cost of Implementation	$150-$200 per student for first-year implementation of the K-5 reading, writing, language, and math curriculum, including materials, training of staff and a part-time school facilitator/curriculum coach.[2]
Results*/Effect Size[3]	Language (+.49 to +.84); reading comprehension (+.07 to +.69); math (+.57 to +1.11).[4] ** To give a sense of scale, an effect size of +1.00 would be equivalent to an increase of 100 points on the SAT scale or 15 points of IQ—enough to move a student from the 20th percentile (the normal level of performance for children in poverty) to above the 50th percentile (the norm for mainstream students).*

Direct Instruction (DI) is a highly-structured instructional approach, designed to accelerate the learning of at-risk students. Curriculum materials and instructional sequences attempt to move students to mastery at the fastest possible pace. The oldest version of the program, Distar, was developed in the 1960s as a part of Project Follow Through, a massive educational initiative of President Johnson's War on Poverty. Despite its success in raising student achievement levels, Distar was heavily criticized for being too rigid; concentrating too heavily on the basics; and for some vendors' poor implementation practices, such as selling it without support as a "teacher-proof" program. As DI, the original Distar program has been expanded and enriched. Although the early mastery of basic skills is still a key element, the program also addresses students' general comprehension and analytic skills. Adequate professional development, ensuring that practitioners understand what the program is and how it works, is also also essential for successful implementation.

Main Features

Scripted Lesson Plans—Classroom scripts are a hallmark of Direct Instruction; the scripts are written, tested, rewritten, retested—polished in a cycle of classroom field-testing and revision that ends only when

trials show that 90 percent of students grasp a lesson the first time around. Without proper orientation, many teachers find this level of prescriptiveness off-putting. The idea, however, is to ensure that even beginning teachers will be successful, and to allow veteran educators to fill any holes in their teaching skills. With curricular and pedagogical details presented in precise relationship to each other, the program offers a template of how to teach particular skills and content. It is a template that can be applied to other curricula or modified to better suit the needs of a particular group of students, but only after the teaching methods have been learned to precision.

Research-Tested Curriculum—In DI, skills are taught in sequence until students have fully internalized them (what cognitive researchers call "automaticity") and students are able to generalize their learning in new, untaught situations. Each lesson sequence is extensively field-tested to determine the most effective and efficient way to lead students to mastery. For example, the first reading and language arts lessons begin with a focus on phonemic awareness, which are followed by increasingly complex phonics and decoding lessons, which are followed by lessons that focus on comprehension and analysis of content, etc. With each lesson building on previously-mastered skills and understandings, teachers are able to dramatically accelerate the pace of learning, even for the most disadvantaged students. New material is usually introduced through teacher presentations to the whole class or small groups, followed by guided practice and frequent checks for individual student mastery. Once the skill has been learned to the point of automaticity, cognitive studies show that it is transferred from short-term to long-term memory, thus freeing children to apply their learning, attend to content, and move on to progressively more difficult and higher-order skills.

Coaches/Facilitators—Another feature of the program is the use of in-class coaches for implementation support. The coach periodically monitors each classroom and is available to assist individual teachers with any problems, perhaps taking over a part of the lesson to model pedagogical procedures. In some cases, this role has been filled by an employee of the contractor, retained to help with implementation. In some multi-school implementations within a single district, teachers are released from regular classroom duty, given special training, and assigned to assist one or two schools.

Rapid Pace—Because the goal of DI is to move students to mastery as quickly as possible, a large proportion of classroom time is spent on fast-paced teacher-directed instruction, punctuated by rhythmic choral-group and individual-student responses. For instructors, this means a very full work day. For example, the DI program requires teachers to ask 300 or more questions in six small-group sessions each day and to perform reading checks every five or 10 lessons to ensure that all students reach 100 percent mastery. This level of interaction, which produces substantial achievement gains, is made possible by the use of the heavily-researched, highly refined scripts.

Achievement Grouping—Common periods for reading and math are established across grades during which students are regrouped by performance level, with the idea that all students will progress at the fastest possible pace and no students will be left behind. In several schools, these groups are reduced in size by assigning half of the class to a paraprofessional who leads the group through guided practice for half of the period, while the teacher introduces new material to the rest of the class, and then changing places. If the program is implemented well, these should not be rigid "tracks," but flexible achievement groups, with students who are progressing quickly periodically reassigned to a faster group and immediate assistance given to students who are struggling.

Frequent Assessments—Frequent assessments are also built into the program as a means to ensure that all students are reaching mastery, to detect any student who might need extra help before falling too far behind, and to identify students who need to be regrouped.

Results

When this program is faithfully implemented, the results are stunning, with high-poverty schools reporting average test scores at or above grade level—in a few cases, several grades above. In the 1977 evaluation of Project Follow Through, the achievement results of high-poverty Direct Instruction students were compared to students in nine other early education programs. DI students outperformed control group students and students in the other experimental programs on every academic measure, moving from the 20th percentile (the normal level of performance for children in poverty) to about the 50th percentile (even with mainstream students). In contrast, the achieve-

ment results of students in some of the other programs actually *declined* as a result of the intervention. Follow-up studies of students taught by Direct Instruction in the early grades also show enduring benefits. One New York comparison found that more than 63 percent of DI students graduated from college, as opposed to 38 percent of the control group; mean ninth-grade test scores were higher (ES=+.41, reading; ES=+.29, math; *see footnote 3*); retention rates were lower (21 percent versus 33 percent); and there were fewer dropouts (28 percent vs. 46 percent).

Case Studies

Wesley Elementary School (Houston, Texas). Wesley Elementary has one of the longest, continuous Direct Instruction implementations in the country. It is located in one of Houston's poorest, mostly African-American, neighborhoods and has a student population that is over 99 percent minority and 90 percent eligible for school lunch subsidies—statistics that usually signal low achievement levels. For many years, however, this school has ranked in the top tier of all schools in the state. Much of this success has been credited to the school's 1975 adoption of Direct Instruction. First piloted in a Title I reading resource room, DI was soon in use throughout the school. By 1980, Wesley students had average test scores above the 80th percentile in both reading and vocabulary, outscoring students in comparison schools by more than 40 percentile points. In many of the succeeding years, Wesley's scores have been even higher, with some classes testing up to three years above grade level.

Utah ASAP Project. As a part of Utah's Accelerated Student Achievement Project (ASAP) to improve poor-performing Title I schools, three elementary schools adopted schoolwide DI programs during the 1994-95 school year. The preliminary achievement data are impressive, with students in all three DI schools outperforming more advantaged control school students in two Woodcock-Johnson subtests. After two years in the program, one school moved from last to second place (out of 24 schools) in the district's annual Math Olympics.

Considerations

This is a highly interactive, teacher-intensive approach to education. Teachers and paraprofessionals must be informed about—and prepared for—its fast pace and the structured and repetitive nature of the program.

DI also has a history of problematic implementations. When the program's developer, former preschool teacher Siegfried Engelmann, started designing the curriculum more than 25 years ago, he included fully-scripted teachers' guides, believing that they could serve as prototype demonstrations for specific teaching skills. In other words, one design objective was to provide hands-on teacher training *during* class-time, thus reducing start-up costs and at the same time ensuring that all teachers would have the skills necessary to reach the maximum achievement levels. Unfortunately, some marketers and administrators interpreted this to mean that *no* training was necessary, and that teaching skill was inconsequential to the success of the program. DI materials were sold as "teacher-proof," leaving administrators who didn't understand the program to impose it in a rigid, dictatorial manner. Educator horror-stories and lower-than-expected achievement levels were the predictable results. In some regions, this has left DI with a tarnished reputation that will have to be clarified and overcome. For any new implementation to be successful, proper orientation and training are vital—not only for teachers and paraprofessionals, but also for administrators.

Another frequent criticism is that DI provides so much structure and regimentation that it stifles student and teacher creativity. The student results—both in higher academic achievement levels and elevated measures of self-esteem—should speak for themselves. Teacher focus groups, following DI implementation in Broward County, Florida, are also instructive. Some teachers felt that the "standardized approach actually allowed more creativity, because a framework was in place within which to innovate," and said that they could do more with content once DI had helped students acquire the necessary skills. Other teachers reported that they had initially been resistant, feeling that "even though the students thrived on it, the repetition was boring for the faculty," but, over time, had found ways "to innovate within the repetition, so that they become drawn in as well."[7]

The Broward implementation also incorporated another important feature: advanced training for and assignment of teaching staff to act as full-time "coaches" (facilitators) for the new DI schools. By retaining their status within the bargaining unit, it was made

clear that these educators were a resource for the benefit of the teaching staff, not administrators. There was always someone to turn to, on a confidential basis, for advice and assistance. Given the inevitable frustrations, glitches, and misunderstandings that arise when implementing any new curriculum, using new instructional methods, this assistance has proven to be invaluable.

Publications/Resources

Adams, Gary L. and Engelmann, Siegfried. *Research on Direct Instruction: 25 Years Beyond Distar* (1996). Seattle: Educational Achievement Systems. 206/820-6111.

Effective School Practices, journal of the Association for Direct Instruction.

Gersten, Russell, et al. "Effectiveness of a Direct Instruction Academic Kindergarten for Low-Income Students," *The Elementary School Journal* (November 1988).

For more information, contact: Direct Instruction Project, University of Oregon, College of Education, 170 Education, Eugene, Oregon 98195, *or* Association for Direct Instruction, P.O. Box 10252, Eugene, Oregon 98195.
Phone: 800/995-2464.
E-mail: ADIhome@aol.com
Internet: http://darkwing. uoregon.edu/~adiep/

These materials are available from the SRA division of Macmillan/McGraw-Hill, 800/843-8855. In addition, several videodisc programs on math, geometry, chemistry, and earth science are available from BFA Educational Media, 800/221-1274.

These costs are based on the budget for the Alliance of Quality Schools in Broward County, Florida, an effort to raise achievement levels of low-performing schools by implementing a DI reading and math curriculum. Estimated per-school costs were as follows: Direct Instruction materials, $35,000; professional development (five days before school and five days during school), $70,000; a trained teacher, assigned to act as a part-time coach/curriculum consultant for the school, $35,600.

An effect size is a standard means of expressing achievement gains and losses across studies, showing differences between experimental and control groups in terms of standard deviation. An effect size of +1.00 indicates that the experimental group outperformed the control group by one full standard deviation. To give a sense of scale, this would be equivalent to an increase of 100 points on the SAT scale, two stanines, 21 NCEs (normal curve equivalent ranks) or 15 points of IQ (Fashola and Slavin, 1996)—enough to move a student from the 20th percentile (the normal level of performance for children in poverty) to above the 50th percentile (in range with mainstream America). Because of differences among study designs and assessments, this can only be considered a "rough" measure of comparison. In general, an effect size of +.25 or more is considered to be educationally significant.

Data from Abt Associates' 1977 evaluation of Project Follow Through and a 1996 meta-analysis of this and more recent studies. See *Research on Direct Instruction: 25 Years Beyond Distar*, by Gary L. Adams and Siegfried Engelmann.

"Alliance of Quality Schools Evaluation Report" (August 1996). School Board of Broward County, Florida.

Core Knowledge (CK)

Grades Covered	Elementary and Middle School/pre K-8
Curriculum Materials	Separate Core Knowledge Sequences—content guidelines—are available for *Preschool*, *Grades K-6* and *Grades 7-8*, detailing what is to be taught in the areas of language arts, American and world civilizations, geography, visual arts, music, math and science. A series of resource books, *What Your Kindergartner(-6th Grader) Needs to Know*, are also available from the Core Knowledge Foundation, as are lesson plans prepared by Core Knowledge teachers around the country, which are assembled and disseminated as "Share the Knowledge" materials.
Instructional Support/ Professional Development	Inservice presentations and professional development workshops can be contracted through the Foundation. It also distributes "model" planning guides and holds an annual conference with a focus on professional development, which brings together more than 1,200 teachers and administrators from around the country.
School Reform/ Restructuring Assistance	Limited assistance can be contracted through the Foundation.
Role of Paraprofessionals	To a large extent, the deployment of classroom paraprofessionals is determined at the school level. CK recommends their use as one-on-one skill-and-content tutors for new and/or struggling students, assistants in researching and developing age-appropriate materials and resources, and sources of assistance for students in completing CK schools' many curriculum-related projects and activities.
Cost of Implementation	Variable. The costs for the curriculum sequence (less than $25/teacher) and workshop training are modest. However, the costs of supplementary curricular materials, professional development, and the faculty release time necessary for properly implementing the program can make it more expensive. One study estimates start-up costs ranging up to $26,000 per school.[1]
Results	Preliminary results are promising, and a large-scale longitudinal study is currently under way.[2] *(See "Results" section, below, for a description of positive results from individual school studies.)*

The Core Knowledge Sequence (CK) was designed to add content to the general skills and objectives typically found in state and local curriculum guides and provide a common core of knowledge in the early grades. Originated by University of Virginia professor E.D. Hirsch, Jr., CK is being implemented in over 350 schools in 40 states around the country. As such, it represents the first articulation of many standards-based reformers' push for a model national curriculum, built around the idea that American schools need challenging academic standards to provide equal educational opportunity. Or, as one teacher describes Core Knowledge, "It's like a gifted curriculum for all kids." Designed to comprise about 50 percent of the school's curriculum, the sequence provides a detailed listing of specific content to be taught, at each grade level, in the disciplines of history, geography, mathematics, science, language arts, and fine arts.

Main Features

Interesting, Detailed Curricular Content—One measure of the success of the standards movement is that virtually every state in the nation is in the process of developing or strengthening its academic standards. Districts, in turn, are attempting to translate these state mandates into curriculum guides. Unfortunately, a majority of these state and district documents are still not clear enough to be useful at the classroom level. Many focus on the skills students are to acquire rather than on the specific content of the curriculum to be delivered. Core Knowledge seeks to fill this hole by outlining the grade-by-grade knowledge that children will be taught. For example, the first-grade history sequence asks schools to: "Introduce [students to] ancient civilizations and the variety of religions in the world, using maps of the ancient world," specifically: *Egypt* (King Tutankhamen, Nile, Pyramids, Mummies, Animal Gods, Hieroglyphics); *Babylonia* (Tigres and Euphrates, Hammurabi); *Judaism* (Moses, Passover, Chanukah); *Christianity* (Jesus); *Arabia* (Mohammed, Allah, Islam); *India* (Indus River, Brahma, Hinduism, Buddha); *China* (Yellow River, Confucius, Chinese New Year).

Sequenced Presentation—Cognitive research indicates that children learn new skills and knowledge by building on what they already know. Core Knowledge's developer, E.D. Hirsch, Jr., observed that this can place some American students at a perpetual disadvantage. Children from highly educated families are exposed to a rich vocabulary and knowledge base in their formative years, enabling them to acquire additional skills and knowledge at a faster pace than their less advantaged peers. The result is an achievement gap that increases through successive years of schooling. The Core Knowledge response is to expose all students, very early, to interesting and demanding subject matter, and then to build on that knowledge, year by year, in a carefully constructed sequence. Because what is to be learned is defined clearly, teachers are better able to provide students with consistent, coordinated instruction. It is also easier to monitor whether students have mastered what they need to know for the grade level and to intervene quickly when students need extra help.

A Common Core—Because the program stipulates exactly what is to be taught grade by grade, students advance through school on a more equal footing. All students, regardless of background or neighborhood, are exposed to a common core of learning, and the watered-down curriculum typical of many high-poverty schools is eliminated. Core Knowledge teachers also have the advantage of knowing exactly what their students have and have not learned the year before. Unlike most U.S. teachers, CK teachers don't have to waste time reteaching previously covered material or developing different lesson plans to accommodate students who already know the material or those who are far behind. Because all teachers in a specific grade level are covering the same material, they are able to work collaboratively, sharing ideas, resources and lesson plans, or even divide up the work of developing a new unit.

Results

Although no large-scale quantitative data are yet available for this program, several studies show impressive results at particular Core Knowledge sites.

For example, recent test results from the Paul H. Cale Elementary School in Albermarle County, Virginia, indicate that the program may raise overall student scores and lower the achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students. Cale is the second-highest poverty elementary school in the district, with approximately 40 percent of students qualifying for free- or reduced-price lunches. A districtwide review of 1996 scores on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills showed that the socioeconomic status of students was an extremely accurate predictor of schools' performance rankings—the higher the concentration of poor students, the lower the percentage who scored above the 50th national percentile. Only one school stood out from this trend: Cale, with almost 70 percent of students scoring above the national norm, had an achievement level that was far above prediction. According to the school's principal, "scores have consistently gone up" over the four years the school has been using Core Knowledge, "especially in social studies, science, and math.... We are scoring well above the national norms in social studies, above the 75th percentile.... Our scores defy what you would expect."[1]

Another recent study demonstrated that students at the Nathaniel Hawthorne Elementary School in San Antonio, Texas, also achieved at higher than expected levels. Hawthorne—an inner-city neighborhood school with a predominantly Hispanic student population, 96 percent of whom qualify for free or reduced

price lunches and 28 percent of whom are limited-English proficient (LEP)—adopted the Core Knowledge curriculum during the 1992-93 school year. According to the author of the Hawthorne study, "although Hawthorne students tend to be more at risk of failing academically than are students in the district as a whole, because of the larger percentages of economically disadvantaged and LEP students, snapshots indicate that the school has succeeded in raising achievement levels beyond the aggregate performance of all other elementary schools in the district." For example, Hawthorne students' performance on the reading portion of the 1994 Texas Assessment of Academic Skills was compared to students in the other 65 elementary schools in San Antonio. "Although district reading performance is generally consistent across grade levels with a student pass rate of about 55 percent, Hawthorne's results show a steep increase in the reading pass rate at consecutive grade levels. At Grade 3, Hawthorne's pass rate of 34 percent is well below that of the district. By Grade 5, however, Hawthorne's 67 percent pass rate far exceeds the district's 56 percent pass rate."[4]

Case Studies

Although Core Knowledge offers a challenging and comprehensive grade-by-grade curriculum sequence, its implementation support—important for successful replications in low-performing schools—is not as strong as that offered by some other proven-program models *(see "Considerations" section, below)*. Therefore, we offer descriptions of two promising implementation models:

The Trinity Partnership—In San Antonio, Texas, Trinity University has established an extensive support system for the implementation of Core Knowledge. As an outgrowth of a pre-existing university-public school partnership, Trinity assisted the city's first Core Knowledge school, Nathaniel Hawthorne (see above), with the implementation of the curriculum. Over the intervening years, as approximately 20 area schools attempted to replicate the program, the university created a network to support the new implementations. Support has come in a variety of forms, such as: coordinating an active network of Core Knowledge schools; offering technical and financial support, including stipends to teachers who participate in network-related activities that extend beyond normal working hours or assigned responsibilities; helping to arrange and facilitate common planning time for grade-level and subject-area teachers; supporting and designing professional development opportunities, including pre- and inservice pedagogical and content-area training; providing access to curricular material and resources, including the creation of a Core Knowledge Technology Center; and supporting "mentorship" and train-the-trainer programs specifically designed to help with the introduction of the program at new sites.

Calvert County, Maryland—Calvert County is the first U.S. school district to implement Core Knowledge in all elementary schools. Much of the impetus for the systemwide adoption came from parents and teachers, responding to information about Core Knowledge pilot programs that had begun in three schools. According to administrators, teacher support ("buy-in") was one of the keys to the program's successful implementation, with the only resistance coming from principals. Today, all 12 Calvert County elementary schools are using the curriculum. Because of the systemwide implementation, Core Knowledge schools in the district seem to have some clear advantages. Economies of scale are achieved by having inservice training delivered for larger groups of teachers; implementation support can be delivered by a small team of central-office "teacher-specialists"; teacher networking and the sharing of experience and information across schools is made possible at the local level; scope and sequence statements, aligned assessments, and other supporting documents are prepared by experts, with teacher input; and the central office, not individual schools or teachers, does the work of aligning the curriculum to state standards. In addition, teachers know exactly what background knowledge to expect from students who transfer from one county school to another.

Considerations

The Core Knowledge Sequence represents the first major effort to specify a common core curriculum for all American students. As such, it goes a long way toward addressing the low expectations for student performance and lack of challenging curricula that characterize many of the nation's low-performing schools. Although implementation assistance can be purchased through the Foundation, it is not as exten-

sive as that offered by school-improvement programs specifically designed to help low-performing schools. While many of these elements currently are being strengthened, CK still lacks: extensive-enough professional development assistance; the school restructuring assistance needed to ensure that teachers share common planning time; readily-available high-quality curricular and other age-appropriate resource materials; and aligned performance standards and assessments. The program requires a lot of staff work during start-up, including extra time spent on researching, planning and writing new lessons. It should also be noted that CK was not designed to strengthen the teaching of basic skills, such as phonics—a priority need for many low-performing schools.

Nevertheless, several schools and school systems—including high-poverty urban schools—have found ways to fill these gaps on their own. Therefore, before deciding whether or not to adopt the program, it is worthwhile for schools to learn how these successful implementations have been supported. The preliminary findings of a three-year quantitative and qualitative longitudinal study of Core Knowledge offer some useful clues.[1] According to the researchers, several factors "greatly facilitated successful early implementations": (1) extra funding for start-up, including teacher preparation, materials, etc., (2) common planning time for teachers, (3) parental and community support, (4) site-based management, which can lead to increased flexibility in the use of resources, etc., (5) district support, (6) interest and support from staff, (7) team teaching, which allows the burden of extra work to be shared, (8) sharing lessons and experience with teachers at other Core Knowledge schools, (9) assistance in finding materials, and (10) local adaptations that help serve schools' specific needs.

At the same time, researchers also detailed the benefits of Core Knowledge: (1) children gain self-confidence as they gain knowledge, (2) students connect to previously learned material, (3) students are more interested in learning and reading, (4) discipline problems decrease, (5) Core Knowledge meets the needs of all students, (6) interaction and accountability among teachers are increased, (7) teachers find their work more interesting and rewarding, and (8) parents are satisfied. The list speaks for itself.

Publications/Resources

"Common Questions about Core Knowledge," *Common Knowledge* (Fall 1993), Vol. 6, No. 4.

"Core Knowledge Schools Take Root Across the Country," *American Educator* (Winter 1996-97), Volume 20, No. 4.

"Why Content Counts," *American Teacher* (March 1997), Vol. 81, No. 6.

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E-mail: coreknow@www.comet.net
Internet: http://www.coreknowledge.org

[1] Stringfield, Datnow, Nunnery, and Ross, "First Year Evaluation of the Implementation of the Core Knowledge Sequence: Qualitative Report" (1996).

[2] Among the other studies now under way is a three-year multistate comparison of schools being conducted by researchers from Johns Hopkins University's Center for the Social Organization of Schools and the University of Memphis *(see footnote 1)*.

[3] Michael Marshall, "Core Knowledge Sequence Credited in Test Score Boosts," *Common Knowledge* (Fall 1996), newsletter of the Core Knowledge Foundation.

[4] Gail Owen Schubnell, "Hawthorne Elementary School: The Evaluator's Perspective," *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk* (1996), Vol. 1, No. 1.

[5] See footnote 1.

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How can the union help to save failing schools? Resolute reform efforts, based on high standards of conduct and achievement and research-proven programs and practices, offer hope for real improvement. This resource guide was designed to provide local union leaders and members with ideas, information, and materials for fixing schools that aren't working. It includes: profiles of research-proven schoolwide improvement programs; materials to audit a school for its most pressing needs; and a review of contract language that supports reform and protects the rights of staff during the transition.

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Setting Strong Standards

To help bring some clarity to the confused and often controversial issue of "standards," the AFT has developed a set of criteria for members and others to use in developing or reviewing student achievement standards. The criteria offer a clear vision to educators and policy makers at all levels of what useful standards should look like. The booklet includes excerpts of actual standards that illustrate many of the criteria.

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Making Standards Matter 1997

Which states are working to develop higher academic standards? Which are making them clear and specific enough to be useful at the classroom level? How many are developing assessments linked to the standards? Which are planning to provide struggling students with the extra help they will need? How does your state measure up? This annual study offers a state-by-state progress report in these key areas.

Item no. 264. $10 each; $8 each for five or more.

Making Standards Count: The Case for Student Incentives

In this May 1994 address to the Brookings Institution, the late AFT president Albert Shanker warns that efforts to raise standards and improve U.S. education will fall short if we don't give students incentives to work hard in school by attaching consequences to academic achievement. The booklet includes excerpts from "*What College-Bound Students Abroad Are Expected To Know About Biology.*"

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Reaching the Next Step: How School-To-Career Can Help Students Reach High Academic Standards and Prepare for Good Jobs

This policy report analyzes traditional school-to-career programs, and makes seven recommendations for "dramatically improving education for those students who have traditionally been left uninspired and unprepared by high school." Recommendations include a rich, high-quality curriculum; rigorous academic coursework in the core subjects; exposure to the work world, which brings relevance to academic work; and incentives for students to study and achieve.

Item no. 281. $5 each (for shipping and handling only).

Reaching the Next Step: A Resource Book for Educators

What does a high-quality school-to-career program look like? This resource book, which includes the above report, illustrates the AFT's school-to-career policy recommendations with detailed descriptions of four schools where successful

school-to-career programs have been implemented. Also included are sample course listings, standards, and exams.

Item no. 282. $10 each (for shipping and handling only).

Defining World Class Standards Series

These publications are designed to illustrate what other countries expect their students to know and be able to do in various subjects and at different grade levels.

Vol. 1. What College-Bound Students Abroad Are Expected To Know About Biology—This book makes available for the first time actual biology exams taken by college-bound students in England and Wales, France, Germany, and Japan. It also includes scoring guides, sample answers, and a brief discussion of each country's education system, as well as the U.S. Advanced Placement biology exam. 120 pages.

Item no. 250. Single copy $10; $8 each for five or more.

Vol. 2. What Secondary Students Abroad Are Expected To Know: Gateway Exams Taken by Average-Achieving Students in France, Germany, and Scotland—This book contains gateway exams taken by average-achieving students at the end of 9th and 10th grade in France (French, Math, and History/Geography); Germany (German, English, and Math); and Scotland (English, Math, and Biology). It also includes a brief discussion of each country's school-to-work transition system and, for comparative purposes, the General Education Development (GED) practice test from the United States. 176 pages.

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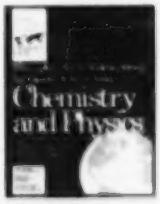
Vol. 3. What College-Bound Students Abroad Are Expected To Know About Chemistry and Physics—This book contains the actual translated chemistry and physics exams taken by college-bound students in England and Wales, France, Germany, and Japan, as well as scoring guides, sample answers, and the U.S. Advanced Placement exams. It also offers a brief overview of each nation's education system, plus a comparative look at how these different systems align their curricula, their exams, and their incentives. 157 pages.



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Setting World-Class Standards

These boxed kits, containing large collections of resources, are designed to help anyone involved in setting or reviewing standards (or developing curriculum) in the core academic subjects. Like the Defining World-Class Standards series, the standards kits show what other high-achieving countries expect their students to know and be able to do, and provide examples of rigorous and exemplary standards, curriculum and assessments from the U.S. The kits also include translated exams from abroad, materials from the Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate programs, grade-level guides from the Core Knowledge Foundation, examples of state and local standards, and materials from other organizations involved in setting standards. Each kit also provides important background materials on standards and systemic reform.

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